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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the Office Technology curriculum, which prepares students for the secretarial field, at a community college in western Canada. The study also explores and compares the perceptions of students, instructors, employers and working secretaries regarding the role of the secretary, and looks at the influences that shape students' attitudes and beliefs about the secretarial field as they undergo secretarial training. The methodology used includes document analysis, observation, and interviews. Findings indicate that current tensions exist amongst the instructor, student, and business agendas due to discrepancies between the mechanist curriculum-as-planned and the experiential curriculum-as-lived. The study recommends that the Office Technology curriculum-as-planned be altered to reflect the demands of the modern workplace, emphasizing cognitive skills such as analyzing, evaluating, and decision-making; interpersonal skills such as conflict resolution, cooperation, and coordination; and personal management skills such as self-confidence, integrity, accountability, and adaptability. The study also recommends that the Office Technology curriculum be strengthened by extending both its length and options that are open to its students. It is further suggested that ties to the business community be augmented through implementation of cooperative education programs and professional development opportunities for college staff. Contains more than 80 references. (AS)

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An Analysis of an Office Technology Curriculum at the College Level

Marla Middleton

The University of Alberta

JC 990 344

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AN ANALYSIS OF AN OFFICE TECHNOLOGY CURRICULUM AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL

BY

MARLA K. MIDDLETON

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND
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FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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The University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled AN ANALYSIS OF AN OFFICE TECHNOLOGY CURRICULUM AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL submitted by MARLA K. MIDDLETON in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

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Date: August 15 1996

DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this work to:

My sisters Sherry, Debra and Janice,
My brother, Allan

and especially to my parents
Audrey & Barry Middleton, whose support and
encouragement has been invaluable
to me throughout my studies.
To them I send my love, admiration, and respect.

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ABSTRACT

The curriculum of college programs in Office Technology has traditionally focused on the task analysis of skills and competencies required by secretaries in the workplace. Arising largely from the management philosophies of Frederick Winslow Taylor, this production model for curriculum reflected the demands of, and to some extent shaped, the twentieth century patriarchal office place.

However, as management philosophies and the business world have changed, so must the Office Technology curriculum. The recent democratizing tendencies that have produced management teams and project work require that the office worker possess a new body of skills and competencies. Perhaps no other office position has altered as much in recent years as that of the secretary. Therefore, the question of whether the curriculum adequately prepares the secretarial student for the contemporary office place is especially germaine.

This dissertation takes a case study approach to examining the Office Technology curriculum in place at a community college in western Canada. Using a combination of document analysis, observation and interview, the study explores and compares the perceptions of students, instructors, employers and working secretaries regarding the role of the secretary. The root assumptions and tacit

learnings revealed in these perceptions provide the basis for suggestions for curriculum development in Office Technology Programs.

The framework used to analyze the Office Technology curriculum is the model developed by Dodds (1983) and modified by Hopper (1993). This framework takes into account different levels of curriculum as well as the influence of instructor- and student-produced individual agendas that affected the Office Technology curriculum. Since the Office Technology curriculum is influenced by the expectations of the business world, the business agenda was added to this model.

The current study contends that the tensions amongst the instructor, student and business agendas is realized as the mechanistic curriculum-as-planned and the experiential curriculum-as-lived. Even though the curriculum-as-planned acknowledged the technical skills the Office Technology students needed to acquire, a parallel curriculum of equal importance was seen to be operating in the curriculum-as-lived. It was through this parallel curriculum that the Office Technology curriculum was updated so it was humanized and current with the requirements of the business world of the 90s.

This study recommends that the Office Technology curriculum-as-planned must be altered to reflect the demands of the modern workplace. It must emphasize cognitive skills such as analysing, evaluating, and decision-making;

interpersonal skills such as conflict resolution, cooperation, and coordination; personal management skills such as self-confidence, integrity, accountability, and adaptability. The study also recommends that the Office Technology curriculum be strengthened by extending both its length and options that are open to its students. These two changes would recognize that the Office Technology program can and should be articulated with Office Management and Business Administration programs. The study further recommends that ties to the business community be augmented through implementation of cooperative education programs and professional development opportunities for college staff.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE STUDY

Introduction

Traditionally, curriculum development in Office Technology has been based upon task analyses of the skills and competencies required in the business world. While an examination of business-related competencies is valuable to Office Technology curriculum development, the result may be a narrowly defined curriculum that ignores other influences that play a role in determining what students actually learn in Office Technology classes. Office Technology curriculum must be concerned not only with what is to be taught, but also with the 'how' and 'why' of the teaching.

For instance, in any classroom, there is a "negotiated pattern of interactions between the teachers and the students" (Claus, 1990, p. 18) which affects curriculum. In the Office Technology curriculum area, research about these interactions is needed to address such questions as: How does a student's background affect her/his education? What factors do teachers think are important for learning? Are students learning what teachers intend? What are students learning about the secretarial field and the world of work?

This study analyzes an Office Technology curriculum using Dodds' (1983) model of curriculum as adapted by Hopper (1993). In her model Dodds suggests that different levels of curriculum operate simultaneously in any educational program. She sees the accessible, inaccessible, covert, null and hidden curricula constituting the functional curriculum. The functional curriculum is what actually takes place in the classroom when the students and instructors come together. It is further shaped by student and instructor agendas and, in the case of the Office Technology Program, by the business agenda as personified by employers and practising secretaries. This study uses document analysis, observation and interview in order to enter the world of students, instructors and the business community to uncover their expectations, needs, and understandings regarding the Office Technology Program.

Coming to the Question

As an Office Technology instructor for eight years, I always enjoyed watching students 'blossom' between the beginning and end of their programs. Encountering graduates of our program in the community who appeared happy with their positions and who appreciated what they had acquired from the Office Technology Program was rewarding. My discussions with program graduates led me to believe that they enjoyed secretarial work. From their comments, I had a positive impression of the secretarial field and felt good about my role in preparing students for secretarial positions.

In the spring of 1988, I invited a guest speaker into my class to talk about labour standards. She informed my students that they were entering "pink ghetto" jobs. The "pink ghetto" statement bothered both my students and me. In an effort to learn more about this issue I read works by Benet (1972), Braverman (1974), Howe (1977), Menzies (1989), Mills (1953) and Pringle (1989). These authors painted a bleak picture of the secretarial field. Clearly, there was a contradiction between my perception of secretaries and the perceptions of others. I wondered about the perceptions of fellow instructors, students, practising secretaries and employers. I felt instructors who understood student perceptions of the secretarial world would be better equipped to help them achieve their career goals in an office setting. I wondered how the Office Technology curriculum could be improved. Was the curriculum centered on training students with specific skills or on developing the 'whole' student? Would Office Technology students be able to adapt in the ever-changing business world or was their background so skill oriented that they would flounder as change occurred? I wished to take a closer look at the curriculum to see what improvements could be made. In addition, since the goal of an Office Technology Program is to prepare students for the working world, I felt there would be value in determining if instructors' perceptions of the secretarial field matched the perceptions of employers and secretaries.

I decided to explore an Office Technology Program in the hopes of helping my colleagues and me become better instructors and improve the Office Technology curriculum for our students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe and interpret the "lived functional curriculum" of the participants in an Office Technology Program at the college level. Meanings and assumptions derived by participants were revealed as well as the root assumptions that gave direction to the program.

Research Questions

The following questions provided a focus and direction to the gathering of data; however, these questions were not limiting:

1. What were the students' perceptions of a secretarial position before they began the Office Technology Program? What were the students' expectations of the Office Technology Program?
2. What were the instructors' perceptions of a secretarial job? What did the instructors view as being important to teach the students? Why was this viewed as important?
3. What were employers' and secretaries' perceptions of a secretarial job? Were the instructors' perceptions of a secretarial job in tune with these perceptions? Were students' perceptions in tune with the employers' and secretaries' perceptions?
4. What messages were sent to the students via the curriculum-as-planned? What information fell into the null curriculum and was therefore

omitted from the program? Through the curriculum-as-lived, what did the instructors want the students to learn?

5. How did the curriculum-as-planned differ from the curriculum-as-lived? What had the students learned about a secretarial job through the curriculum-as-lived?

Delimitations

The study was delimited to:

1. the description of the experiences and understandings of students, instructors and representatives of the business community involved in one Office Technology Program during the 1992-93 college academic year (September-April) at a community college in a western Canadian city;

2. the exploration, analysis, and interpretation of the understandings and experiences of students, instructors, and representatives of the business community involved in one Office Technology Program; and

3. the methodology used – a case study approach. Different types of inquiry may have revealed other insights into the functional Office Technology curriculum as lived by the participants.

Limitations

The study was limited by:

1. the willingness of the participants who were being interviewed for the research to be open and honest in sharing their experiences and perceptions with the researcher;
2. the perceptions and experiences shared by the participants during the collection of data;
3. the participants' convenience, cooperation and availability during the period of time the data were collected; and
4. the ability of the researcher to:
    (a) develop a climate of trust and cooperation in conducting open-ended interviews,
    (b) analyze the data responsibly, and
    (c) report the research findings obtained from the participants using their own terminology.

Clarification of Terms

The following terms, as used in this study, are clarified:

Office Technology/business education: Office Technology refers to a one-year secretarial program at the college level, whereas business education is secretarial training at the high school level.

Clerk/secretary/office worker: Employees who handle correspondence, records, accounts and manage routine and detail work for a superior. These terms are used interchangeably in this document.

Business/business world/employers: These terms are used interchangeably and refer to the people who employ or supervise office workers.

Significance of the Study

Few studies in business education or Office Technology have taken a qualitative research approach (Valli, 1986; Gaskell, 1986; Gaskell and Riecken, 1988; Beebe, 1988; McConaghy, 1990). Valli (1986) observed a high school business education co-op program and determined that both the school and work settings encouraged a docile respect for authority in students. Gaskell (1986) observed high school business education classes and interviewed business education students, teachers, guidance counsellors and the business education co-ordinator. Gaskell's observations showed that the teachers' influences worked to ensure that the social and ideological relations of the workplace were maintained. Gaskell and Riecken (1988) interviewed women in clerical programs and discovered that there were many contradictions between what the students were taught and the reality of a clerical position. Beebe (1988) observed high school typewriting classes and reported how the ritual process related to these classes. McConaghy (1990) interviewed high school business education teachers and students to come to an understanding of participants' notions of work.

Most research in Office Technology or business education has been quantitative in nature and has focused on surveys administered to employers and graduates from secretarial programs to determine the competencies required by secretaries. For example, Ewing (1991) used a four-round modified Delphi Technique to gather information from a focus group and a panel of experts on desired future secretaries' competencies. Once identified, Ewing determined the importance of these competencies for the next five to ten years. Mott (1988) used a survey to determine if there were differences between the secretarial skills required by major employers and those included in a selected secretarial curriculum. Arneson (1989) sent questionnaires to temporary help firms to determine specific job skills and training of temporary workers. Henderson (1992) used questionnaires to obtain current labour market data that would aid in secretarial curriculum development. Reynolds (1993) surveyed supervisors/managers of secretaries and entry-level secretaries in Fortune 500 companies to detect the competencies required by secretarial graduates from Ohio's technical colleges. These perceptions were then compared with the perceptions of secretarial program faculty.

Present Study

While research to determine competencies required by secretaries is important for curriculum development, it does not take into account other factors that play a role in what Office Technology students learn during their schooling. There is a need for research that explores the influences that shape students' attitudes and beliefs about the secretarial field as they undergo secretarial training.

A qualitative research approach is used in this study to help clarify Office Technology students' perceptions regarding the secretarial role and the Office Technology curriculum in which they are immersed. The role of their instructors and the curriculum in shaping those perceptions are explored. In addition, secretaries' and employers' perceptions are examined to see if they are "in tune" with students' and instructors' perceptions and the curriculum itself.

This study is significant in a number of ways. (1) Since students' beliefs will affect how they perform their jobs once they become secretaries, the study examines students' perceptions about what they believe it means 'to be a secretary.' (2) The study questions whether instructors' beliefs about a secretarial position and the personal experiences and stories they share in the classroom play a role in shaping and redefining students' perceptions of the secretarial position. (3) The study investigates beyond the classroom to the business community where the students will eventually work. It enquires whether or not the students' and instructors' perceptions are "in tune" with the perceptions of the business community. (4) No recent study employing qualitative research methodology to analyze a college Office Technology curriculum could be found in the literature.

Assumptions

In the undertaking and completion of this study, it was assumed that:

1. The research methodology of the study was appropriate for the purposes of the study.
2. Sufficient data would be collected during the period of time in which the study was conducted to reveal significant perceptions and experiences of Office Technology students, Office Technology instructors, secretaries and employers.
3. Since there are multiple realities, participants would share their individually constructed realities.
4. The collective realities of the participants would provide a more complete picture of what it means to be a secretary.
5. The researcher would provide an open atmosphere in which participants would feel comfortable revealing their perceptions and experiences.
6. The researcher would be able to analyze the rich data acquired from the in-depth interviewing of Office Technology students, instructors, practising secretaries and employers; observations of Office Technology classes; Office Technology curriculum materials; and would report this information in such a fashion that readers could transfer the findings to other contexts.

Program Being Studied

The College

The college in this study will be called Lawson Regional College so its identity will be protected. Lawson Regional College is an attractive community college (approximately 2000 students) located in a small city in western Canada. Since many students come from the surrounding small towns, they like the fact that the teachers take time to get to know them personally; the size of the college gives the students a sense of belonging. Students often comment that the college is more like a "big school" and not as intimidating as a university or larger college.

The Office Technology Program

Historical Perspective. When the Office Technology Program originally began at Lawson Regional College, it was called Secretarial Science and all courses were offered at a local high school. In the 1970s, when the college as a whole had grown enough to warrant its own building, all college programs at the high school moved to the new site. In 1977, the Secretarial Science Program consisted of two streams: Clerk Typist and Stenographer. The main difference between the two programs was that the Stenographers studied shorthand.

Ten years later, program instructors became involved in Professional Secretaries International (PSI). PSI promotes the Certified Professional Secretary

(CPS) designation. A CPS designation is achieved by completing educational and secretarial employment requirements and passing the CPS examination. The CPS examination consists of six parts: Behavioral Science in Business, Business Law, Economics and Management, Accounting, Office Administration and Communication, and Office Technology. The instructors saw the CPS designation in the secretarial field as parallel to designations such as Certified Managerial Accountant (CMA) in the accounting field. Because they felt the CPS designation promoted professionalism for secretaries, they encouraged their students in this direction. At this time shorthand was losing popularity and so the instructors decided to drop the shorthand classes in the Stenographers' route and adapt this route to include courses that would help students prepare for the CPS examinations. Two shorthand classes (Forkner I and Forkner II) were removed from this route and Business Law and Introduction to Business were added. The Stenographer route was renamed Professional Secretary. Even though the Receptionist/Typist route stayed basically the same, it was renamed Office Assistant to sound more professional.

Demographics. The Office Technology Program is part of the Business Department. Students who successfully complete the Office Technology Program graduate with a one-year Office Technology certificate. Students wishing to graduate with a diploma can combine one year of Office Technology courses graduate with a Business Administration diploma. The Office Technology Program is a quota program of 60 students. The program operates from September to mid-April with an optional two-week career experience in the spring semester.

The current study examines both streams of the Office Technology Program: Office Assistant and Professional Secretary. The Office Assistant route provides students with all the basic skills and knowledge required for an office position, while the Professional Secretary route provides students with the basic skills required for an office position and gives some preparation for the CPS (Certified Professional Secretary) examinations. Both programs have the same entrance requirements except the Professional Secretary Route requires that students have a minimum typewriting speed of 30 wpm with 90 percent accuracy.

Office Technology Program

Office Assistant Route	Professional Secretary Route
Beginning Typewriting	Business Law
Basic Accounting or Introductory Accounting	Introduction to Business
	Introductory Accounting
Business Communications	Business Communications
Introductory Office Procedures	Introductory Office procedures
Introduction to Computers	Introduction to Computers
Business Mathematics & Machines	Business Mathematics & Machines
Advanced Office Procedures	Advanced Office Procedures
Oral Communications	Oral Communications
Advanced Typewriting	Advanced Typewriting
Office Management	Office Management

Figure 1

In order for students to receive an Office Technology certificate, they must pass all Office Technology courses of the Office Technology Program, have minimum keyboarding skills of 45 words per minute with 90 percent accuracy, and have a minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.0 on a 4.0 scale with no more than one D or D+ grade.

The Students

All students taking the Office Technology Program are female. Most have come directly from high school but some are returning to school after raising a family. Students in each route take most of their classes together and, even though they often become a close-knit group who support one another, there are points of friction. For example, every year there is a picture taken of all the students. This year the students from the Professional Secretary route asked, "Do we have to have our picture taken with the Office Assistant route? Can't we each have our own group picture?" Some students in the Professional Secretary stream feel that their program is more demanding and superior to the other stream since they are required to take classes in Business Law and Introduction to Business. The Business Law course is a university transfer course which the students in the Professional Secretary route find very demanding.

The Instructors

There are five instructors in the Office Technology Program. All instructors have bachelor degrees and three have or are working towards a Master of Science degree majoring in Business Education.

Even though the Office Technology instructors are in the Business Administration Department, their offices are located by the typewriting rooms at the opposite end of the campus from the Business Administration Department. Instructors in Office Technology, therefore, have little interaction with their colleagues in Business Administration.

Organization of the Study

An introduction to the study has been presented in this chapter. Chapter 2 includes the theoretical framework for the study and a review of the literature. In Chapter 3, the research methodology is discussed. In Chapter 4, interview data are analyzed through an examination of the student, instructor, secretary and employer agendas. In Chapter 5, the findings of the study are discussed. In Chapter 6, recommendations are provided and, in Chapter 7, the author's reflections are presented.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The literature review is organized into four sections. In the first section the theoretical framework used for gathering, interpreting and analyzing data is described. In section two, current secretarial curriculum models developed by professional organizations are reviewed. Because the major purpose of an Office Technology Program is to prepare students for the world of work, philosophical perspectives on Office Technology are reviewed in the third section. In the remainder of the literature review contemporary research related to Office Technology curriculum is presented.

Theoretical Framework: Towards a Definition of an Office Technology Curriculum

Production Model

What is meant by curriculum? The definition of curriculum depends on whether a narrow or broad interpretation is intended. For example, curriculum could be defined as all the experiences that occur in school or it could be defined as the content of a given subject area. There are those who argue that, in the past, the definition of curriculum has been quite narrow. Macdonald (1975) cites Kliebard who contends that for the past 50 years curriculum has been based on a dominant production model. This production model relies on a technological rationale rather than a philosophical or scientific theory. Macdonald (1975) states that the technical model of curriculum "has been developed to its greatest sophistication by vocational education workers (p. 7)." He cites Smith and Moss who summarize the process developed for the technical model as:

1. specifying the role for which training is to be provided
2. identifying the specific tasks that comprise the role
3. selecting the tasks to be taught
4. analyzing each of the tasks
5. stating performance objectives
6. specifying the instructional sequence
7. identifying the conditions of learning
8. designing an instructional strategy
9. developing instructional events
10. creating student and curriculum evaluation procedures and devices. (p. 7)

Many curriculum theorists have accepted this technical approach as a basis for curriculum development. However, a common critique of this approach is that it accepts social values without questioning them. Rather than starting curriculum development by asking "What should to be taught?", the technical approach begins with the assumption that the present system should be reproduced. Curricula based on the dominant production model are plagued by an ahistorical posture (Kliebard as cited by Macdonald, 1975). Alternative modes to the dominant production model are needed.

Rather than accepting the production model, this study will explore the participants' perceptions in order to uncover root assumptions and tacit learnings. The findings of this study will then provide the basis for suggestions on curriculum development in Office Technology. A more intensive critique of traditional models is contained in Chapter Five.

Theoretical Framework

For the theoretical framework of this study, Dodds' (1983) model of curriculum as adapted by Hopper (1993) was used. This framework offers a practical, concrete model which takes into account different levels of curriculum. This framework also takes into account the influences that instructor and students have on the curriculum. For example, the life histories of instructors and students influence the curriculum. Instructors' experiences and beliefs affect what is taught and students' experiences and beliefs affect what is learned in a classroom. Because the expectations of the business world play a role in shaping and moulding an Office Technology curriculum, a "Business Agenda" was added to Dodds' (1983) model of curriculum analysis as modified by Hopper (see Figure 2).

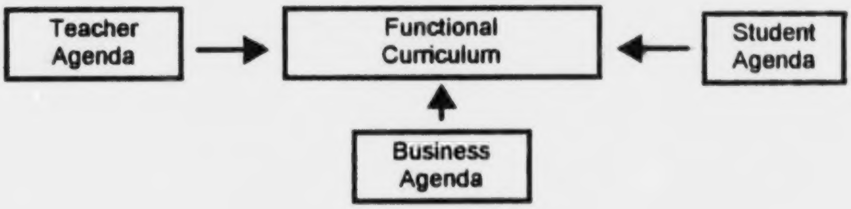

Figure 2 - Dodds' Analysis (1983) as modified by Hopper (1993)

Functional Curriculum

In addition to exploring the student, instructor and business agendas, this study explores the various levels of a curriculum according to Dodds (1983) as modified by Hopper (1993) that operate simultaneously in a classroom. Dodds (1983) describes these different levels as the accessible and inaccessible, the explicit and the implicit, the covert, the null and the hidden curriculum. Hopper (1993) further defines these levels (Figure 3), which constitute the functional curriculum. The functional curriculum can be defined as what happens in a classroom when the students and instructors interact.

The following is a modified description of the various levels of curriculum according to Dodds (1983) as modified by Hopper (1993).

LEVELS OF CURRICULUM

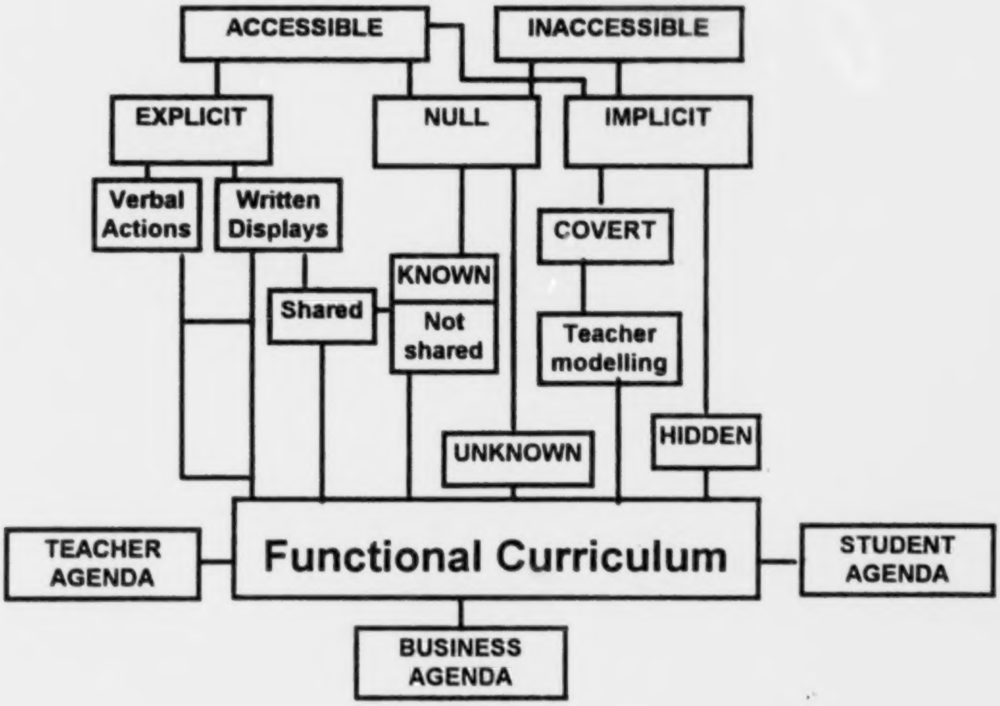
ACCESSIBLE
INACCESSIBLE
EXPLICIT
NULL
IMPLICIT
Verbal Actions
Written Displays
COVERT
KNOWN
Shared
Not shared
Teacher modelling
UNKNOWN
HIDDEN
TEACHER AGENDA
Functional Curriculum
STUDENT AGENDA
BUSINESS AGENDA

Figure 3 - Dodds' Analysis (1983)
as modified by Hopper (1993)

Accessible Curriculum. The accessible curriculum is the curriculum that the instructor is aware of and has control over.

Inaccessible Curriculum. In contrast to the accessible curriculum, the instructor does not have control over or have conscious knowledge of the inaccessible curriculum. Even though the instructor is unaware of the inaccessible curriculum, it is possible for an outsider such as a researcher to tap into this curriculum. An outsider can then share this information with an instructor who is open to expanding her/his understanding of instructor-student interactions.

Explicit Curriculum. The explicit curriculum is "The overtly stated teacher-intended outcomes of which both teachers and students are aware" (Dodds, p. 217). This can take the form of verbal actions or written displays.

Implicit Curriculum. The implicit curriculum is defined as what the students learn that has not been overtly stated or modelled by the instructor but has been transmitted through the context of the learning situation.

The Covert Curriculum. This curriculum is masked or concealed from students and is subtly transmitted by the instructor's behaviour.

The Hidden Curriculum. In the hidden curriculum, both instructors and students are unaware of the learning occurring beyond the explicit curriculum. "Students learn from the nature of schools as institutions--which sets of (middle class) values are perpetuated, that their social behaviours should conform to instructor expectations, that instructors have dominant powers, and that students comprise the relatively less powerful subordinate groups in schools" (Dodds, p. 220). Hopper (1993) states the "educational establishment's hidden curriculum is made up of the of the potential learning outcomes that derive from two different sources: (1) the secondary consequences of the institutional staff's actions and

(2) the secondary consequences of the institution's physical environment and structural system (p. 18)."

The Null Curriculum. The null curriculum consists of what the instructor does not teach--what she/he leaves out of the curriculum. The known null are the parts of the curriculum that are omitted for reasons such as time limitations. The instructor can share the reasons (shared null) or not (unshared null). The unknown null refers to aspects of a topic which could be included in the curriculum but of which the instructor is unaware (Hopper, 1993). An awareness of what is being ignored and why may reveal to the educator unexpected questions and answers.

Teacher Agenda. The functional curriculum is influenced by teachers since the teachers' belief systems will influence how they present information.

Student Agenda. The functional curriculum is influenced by students since their expectations will influence what they learn in class.

Business Agenda. Because the Office Technology Program is preparing students to work in the business world, the functional curriculum is affected by the expectations of the business community. In this study the business agenda is represented by the perceptions of employers and working secretaries.

Functional Curriculum. The functional curriculum is what actually takes place when the instructor (with the accessible and inaccessible curricula) and the students come together. The functional curriculum is the give and take between student and instructor. What takes place in the classroom is moulded by all actors–both instructors and students. In order to analyze the functional curriculum, meanings present in the explicit, covert, hidden and null curricula need to be revealed.

Office Technology Curriculum Models Developed by Professional Organizations

A number of curriculum models have been developed by professional organizations for or related to office technology (Ford, 1990). Three such examples come from The Association for Information Systems Professionals (AISP), the National Business Education Association (NBEA) and Professional Secretaries International (PSI).

The Association for Information System Professionals

AISP developed a curriculum for post-secondary institutions in reaction to the expressed needs of business. This curriculum is intended for one- and two-year post-secondary institutions. It was established in an open-entry, open-exit format to meet the needs of three types of individuals: (1) the high school graduate, (2) the person seeking to upgrade previous skills, and (3) the person requiring retraining for a new career. Its main purpose was to provide the business world with competent entry-level personnel who are prepared to take the Certified Professional Secretary (CPS) examinations. The core courses in this curriculum are Computer Business Applications I and II, Database Systems, Telecommunications/ Networking, Applied Information Systems, Integrated Information Systems, Information Systems Administration, Communication for the Automated Office and Human Behaviour in Organizations. Teaching materials have been developed for these core courses.

National Business Education Association

The NBEA developed a curriculum model for business education from kindergarten throughout grade 12. It provides a list of competencies required for entry-level employment in the business world. The competencies were designed by teachers and people from industry. Secondary and post-secondary students acquire "basic skills and core competencies, processing text skills and competencies, processing data skills (accounting and record keeping), and entrepreneurship competencies" (Ford, 1990, p. 73). Each competency is subdivided into three parts: (1) the conditions under which the student is expected to perform, (2) a statement of what the student is expected to do, and (3) the minimum level of proficiency allowed.

Professional Secretaries International

PSI sponsored the development of a model curriculum to be used at the post-secondary level to prepare students to become office professionals. The goals of this curriculum are "qualification to sit for entry-level certification, attainment of associate's degree, specialization in structured career paths, specialized training, qualification to sit for CPS rating, and employment" (Ford, 1990, p. 76). Because one of the goals of the PSI Curriculum is to prepare students for the CPS (Certified Professional Secretary) examinations, institutions must be attentive to the specific course content that the CPS examination tests. The CPS examination consists of six parts: Behavioral Science in Businesses, Business Law, Economics and Management, Accounting, Office Administration and Communication, and Office Technology.

Office Technology Curriculum at Lawson Regional College

Even though the Office Technology Program did not use one of the curriculum models developed by a professional organization, the Professional Secretary route was developed with a concern for preparing students to write the CPS examinations. Instructors adapted courses which were being used in the Office Technology Program and courses from the Business Administration Program so that all the material that students would need to be prepared for the

CPS examinations was covered. In order to do this, three Business Administration courses that existed in the college calendar, but which were not being used, became part of the program. For example, Office Management was adapted and included in both routes, and Business Law and Introduction to Business were added to the Professional Secretary route.

Historical and Philosophical Perspectives on Office Technology

To fully comprehend the design of an Office Technology curriculum an understanding of the historical and philosophical perspectives of the business world is helpful. This section begins with a brief history of the secretarial position and people's reasons for entering the field. Next, ways in which mechanization and patriarchal relationships have affected the secretarial field are explored. Then cultural influences affecting issues such as respect, advancement and pay for secretaries are reviewed and finally the changing workplace is discussed.

The image of the secretary has been shaped by history and culture. Prior to the nineteenth century, secretaries had one thing in common -- they were highly educated, middle-class men who received respect and admiration and who enjoyed a one-on-one relationship with their employers. The position of secretary was seen as a door to other opportunities such as promotion to manager or partner (Goldberg, 1983; Werkman, 1986).

The scribes of ancient Egypt were secretaries. Since scribes could read and write, they were among the most highly educated men of the time (Garfield, 1986). "Set your heart on being a scribe," concludes one text, "so you can direct the whole earth" (Garfield, 1986, p. 14).

During the Middle Ages, clergymen performed secretarial duties. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the original meaning of a clerk was "man in a religious order, cleric, clergyman" (1977, p. 492).

> As the scholarship of the Middle Ages was practically limited to the clergy, and they performed all the writing, notarial, and secretarial work of the time, the name 'clerk' came to be equivalent to 'scholar' and especially applicable to a notary, secretary, recorder, accountant or penman. (Oxford English Dictionary, 1977, p. 492)

Early in the mid-nineteenth century, clerks performed jobs that would be classified as managerial. Braverman (1974) quotes from Lockwood who describes the clerk of the mid-nineteenth century: "Many of the clerks mentioned at the earlier period were probably performing duties that would nowadays be classified as managerial" (p. 293). Braverman also quotes Lewis Corey who describes the clerk in the United States:

> The clerk was an honoured employee 150 years ago, and still more so in earlier times. His position was a confidential one. The employer discussed affairs with him and relied on his judgement; he might, and often did, become a partner and marry the employer's daughter. The clerk was measurably a professional and undeniably a member of the middle class. (1974, p. 294)

After learning the business of the firm to which they were attached, apprenticed clerks often became owners or managers themselves (Davies, 1982).

In the nineteenth and early parts of the twentieth century, clerical work was considered men's work. Prentice notes how in 1889 that the hiring of a woman stenographer by the Bank of Nova Scotia in St. John's, Newfoundland was considered an "'experiment'....courageously and gallantly undertaken" (Hansen cited in Prentice, 1988, p. 127). Since that time the number of Canadians in clerical occupations has increased with surges between 1911 and 1921 and again between 1941 and 1951 (Lowe, 1993). Recruitment of women into the clerical field during World War I established clerks as the major white-collar group in the labour force (Lowe, 1993). In general, wars helped to increase the acceptability of women in the workplace. Today women comprise 99 percent of the clerical workforce (Minister of Supply and Services, 1996).

Clerical work that had once allowed a male clerk to advance in business became routinized, mechanical, and deadend once it was labelled "women's" work. As long as the secretarial field was occupied by men, it was an apprenticeship where the secretary could learn the business. The position was viewed with respect. At the time when women entered the secretarial field, women in the workplace were not valued. Therefore, when secretarial work came to be seen as women's work, it was not respected. Today's image of the secretary has been shaped by this historical development. Many perceptions of today's secretary stem back to a time when the work women performed was not valued.

Why Clerical Work Became a Predominately Female Occupation

Today, approximately 99 percent of the clerical workforce is composed of women (Minister of Supply and Service, 1996, p. 41). However, as history reveals, at one time it was entirely composed of men. Why the influx of women?

Women Entered the Labour Force. As the economy expanded and became more complex, a greater need for workers in the fields of communication and recordkeeping existed (Rotella, 1981). In addition, wars offered the opportunity for women to fill the positions of men who had been drafted (Rotella, 1981; Goldberg, 1983).

Stereotyping. In order to increase efficiency, office work became more like assembly work in a factory. Jobs were mechanized and made routine. Gone were the days of clerks apprenticing to learn the business. It was a commonly held belief that women were best suited to work that was routine and required dexterity. Women were seen as "perfect" for the job since they were "docile and lacked ambition" (Rotella, 1981, p. 7).

Dollars and Cents. A major incentive for hiring women for clerical positions was that women were cheaper to employ than men. Patriarchal society believed that women were 'simple' and inferior to men. In addition, all women were thought to be working for 'pin money' (Anderson, 1976). Because older women were not seen as breadwinners, it was considered acceptable to pay them less. Young women were not seen as serious about work because they were thought to be working only until marriage (Davies, 1982).

Better Working Conditions. Clerical work was viewed as having better working conditions and fewer health hazards for women than the factory or "sweatshop." It also offered shorter work hours, vacation pay, sick leave and some opportunities for promotion (Rotella, 1981; Davies, 1982).

Higher Status. Clerical work had a higher status than most other jobs. It was one of the few options for a liberated woman. Because of discrimination, women had been excluded from most professional organizations (Rotella, 1981; Davies, 1982).

Escape Through Marriage. Women trying to find a better life had the opportunity to be in contact with a higher class of employee while working in an office. Women felt they could better themselves by marrying a white-collar worker (Rotella, 1981).

Higher Salaries. Between 1870 and 1930, secretaries earned better salaries than other non-professional occupations traditionally held by women. In the early part of the period, clerical workers earned more than teachers.

> In 1876, when the first women clerks were being hired in federal offices at an average salary of $900, public school teachers in the District of Columbia earned

> between $400 and $700, with a few making as much as $800. In 1886, when a saleswoman in a dry good store earned only $6 a week, a proficient woman typist in a business office earned $15 (Rotella, 1981, p. 58).

The Typewriter. Because it was new and therefore gender neutral, typewriting was not viewed as a masculine occupation. Being a typist was, therefore, an acceptable position for a woman (Lowe, 1987; Davies, 1982).

Many factors such as the change in attitude towards employed women, the conditions and status of clerical work, the invention of the typewriter, the need for clerical staff and lower wages for women – all worked together to create an occupation that was labelled as "female."

> The nineteenth-century clerk had not turned into a proletarian; he had merely turned into a woman (Davies, 1982, p. 175).

Effects of Mechanization on the Office

In White Collar Workers, Mills (1953) contrasts the "old middle class" of independent businessmen and farmers to the "new middle class" of salaried workers in order to show how the world of the white collar worker has evolved. Mills says that, in the "old middle class," employees could acquire an overview of the entire business and aspire to a higher position. In the "new middle class," employees are nothing more than machine attendants who fail to learn the overall operation and so are left in dead-end positions.

Mills (1953) and Braverman (1974) both see the mechanization of the office as the deskilling of workers. They feel that workers have been transformed from craftspeople into extensions of machines. Work that once required considerable judgement and held prestige has been deskilled and is now controlled by management. Clerical work changed from an occupation with possibilities for advancement to one where opportunities for promotion are few.

Mills (1953) sees office positions not only as deskilled work that effectively blocks employees from promotion, but also as a reservoir for people who are content to remain in dead-end positions. In analyzing this "no-win" situation for women, Tepperman (1976) supports Mills.

> This is exactly what happens with many secretaries. They do know their bosses' jobs and even do their bosses' work many times. But they're still paid a clerical salary. This leads to problems of discontent and requests for raises. So it's better for the company if most people are uninformed and limited in understanding. This may make them more willing to accept their low pay gracefully, since their jobs are not 'worth' any more. (Tepperman, 1976, p. 58-59)

Braverman (1974) thinks management's need for control reduces employees to manual workers who are valued more for their mechanical skills and ability to follow orders without question than for their intelligence. He rejects the notion that the skill level of the workforce is rising but sees instead a split, with a decline in skills required by workers and an increase in control maintained by managers. He also sees the gap between factory workers and office workers decreasing.

Effects of Patriarchal Relationships on the Office

Benet (1972), Howe (1977), and Pringle (1989) feel that women have not come as far towards equality in the workplace as some people would like to think. Women are still trapped in traditional roles, but not in the home as in the past; now they are being trapped in the office under the guise of a job. Benet (1972) and Howe (1977) see the office as more resistant to change than the home because the office continues to reinforce the concept of patriarchy. Since non-coercive methods are applied in the office, women sometimes fail to see that they are being manipulated or treated as inferior.

Based on data Benet (1972) gained from her interviews with secretaries and bosses, she says secretaries are undervalued. She explains that secretaries are placed in a situation where the only power game they can play is one of being sweet and subservient. She sees women as trapped in an endless cycle – lack of education because it is not expected of women, closed job opportunities because they lack education, poor pay and boring jobs which make marriage look like a solution, as well as the existence of women at home who promote the concept that women do not really need to work.

Howe (1977) also feels it is only an illusion that conditions in the workplace for women have vastly improved. The reality of the situation is that occupational segregation is the same as in 1900 with the only change being in the type of job. The average female worker is in a job mainly performed by women and is paid less than those in jobs that are mainly performed by men. She finds the equal pay for equal work laws are deceptive in that women are only competing with other women. She feels that women are discriminated against by segregation of jobs by gender.

Like Howe (1977), Pringle (1989) feels that occupational choice is still largely determined by class and gender. She notes that many people, including feminists, take the stance that offices should be gender-neutral. However, she feels that this can be dangerous because, in reality, it just masks male domination. Pringle feels that men use sexuality as a way of maintaining power and control. There needs to be recognition of gender differences; otherwise, women are forced to be "honorary men" and play by men's rules. By acknowledging that gender-neutrality really means having masculine values, men may be forced to recognize and deal with their sexual behaviour.

Pringle feels that women must convert the present situation into one where they can be "subjects" rather than "objects" when it comes to gender or sexuality. She also adds that, if a woman is seen as lacking what a man has and a secretary is seen as lacking what a boss has, the work of secretaries is trivialized and the chance for promotion is reduced.

Cultural Influences Affecting Respect for Secretaries

In our society, jobs requiring more skills are seen to be more deserving of respect while jobs not requiring as many skills are looked down upon. However, the culture in which we live affects which skills are seen as important. Gaskell (1991) refers to Braverman who makes the following analogy:

> In the circumstances of an earlier day, when a largely rural population learned the art of managing horses as part of the process of growing up, while few as yet knew how to operate motorized vehicles, it might have made sense to characterize the former as part of the common heritage and thus no skill at all, while driving, as a learned ability, would have been thought of as a 'skill.' Today, it would be more proper to regard those who are able to drive vehicles as unskilled in that respect at least, while those who can care for, harness and manage a team of horses are certainly the possessors of a marked and uncommon ability. There is certainly little reason to suppose that the ability to drive a motor vehicle is more demanding, requires longer training or habituation time, and thus represents a higher or intrinsically more rewarding skill (p. 430).

The way in which we evaluate skills required by a secretary has been shaped by how society in the past has viewed secretaries and women. For example, in the same way that skills required by housewives are downplayed, the skills secretaries require may be "taken for granted" and not acknowledged. Gaskell (1991) states that the evaluation of a skill is a "highly political, contextual and ideological" process.

> 'Skill' is a category that gives status and importance to work in common parlance and in wage negotiations. Skill categories are ideological categories, used to justify and challenge existing hierarchies at work. Indeed, some would argue that skill designations are nothing more than power relations expressed in the language of a skill. The more important, highly paid, powerful work must by definition be more 'skilled.' (p. 143)

Phillips and Taylor (1980) acknowledge that skill definitions are saturated with bias. They believe that the "classification of women's jobs as unskilled and men's jobs as skilled or semi-skilled frequently bears little relation to the actual amount of training or ability required for them (p. 70)." Women's work is often classified as inferior simply on the basis that women do it. Gaskell (1991) says that many times at work, if a boss does a job, it requires skill. If this job is delegated to the secretary, it is seen as less difficult.

Another factor influencing respect is the education required in the field. Some groups, such as doctors and engineers, are able to use education to restrict entry into their occupations; on the other hand, women have not had the political might to restrict entry into their traditional fields of clerical work and childcare (Gaskell, 1991). The fact that someone can become a secretary with only a grade twelve education affects the respect secretaries as a whole receive.

Cultural Influences Affecting Advancement for Secretaries

Kanter (1977) says the secretary/boss relationship can stand in the way of secretaries advancing into higher positions. Kanter describes the secretary/boss relationship as the most obvious example of "patrimony" in a bureaucracy. Patrimonial relationships are ones in which bosses feel they "own" their secretaries. An analogy would be a master/servant relationship. This condition is created because secretaries believe their success in a company depends upon their bosses' goodwill. Because bosses have a say in the secretaries' pay and power, they have power and control over the secretaries' lives. The lack of job descriptions plus the use of a system that does not evaluate secretaries on their skills establishes an atmosphere that breeds patrimony.

> When bosses make demands at their own discretion and arbitrarily; choose secretaries on grounds that enhance their own personal status rather than meeting organizational efficiency tests; expect personal service with limits negotiated privately; exact loyalty; and make the secretary a part of their private retinue, moving when they move, then the relationship has elements of patrimony. (p. 73)

Kanter describes three components of the boss-secretary relationship that build skills that are in opposition to skills required for management: status contingency, principled arbitrariness, and fealty.

Status contingency. Secretaries' rewards are not based on their work and skills but on their bosses' rank and power. Bosses can choose secretaries for their personal qualities, not their skills. What results is a patrimonial relationship where the boss views the secretary as a personal belonging or "my girl."

Principled arbitrariness. A secretary is subject to the arbitrary power of a boss who is only restrained by the limitations of principle, or tradition. This creates a situation where secretaries are not sure where to draw the line. What is part of their job and what is not? Is doing personal errands for the boss a legitimate request? "Official job descriptions are fuzzy enough that they are not sure if they can refuse" (Kanter, 1977, p. 80). The boss not only determines what the secretary does with her time but also if she can advance in the company. A secretary's future can therefore depend mainly on the relationship built between her and her boss.

Fealty. A secretary is encouraged through nonmaterial rewards such as love and symbolic rewards such as prestige and flattery to be devoted to a boss and to accept her subordinate position passively. There is an expectation that a secretary would be loyal to her boss. "Secretaries are rewarded for their attitudes rather than for their skills, for their loyalty rather than their talent." Secretaries are rewarded for "the quality of their relationship with bosses: appearing to like their jobs and being willing to take care of their bosses' personal needs" (Kanter, 1977, pp. 85-86). These three elements of patrimony have set the stage for the frequent use of the "marriage metaphor" where the secretary is seen as the "office wife" (Kanter, 1977, p. 89).

Kanter describes another factor that stands in the way of promotions--the dilemma of indispensability. A secretary who has proven herself is seen by the employer as too good an employee to lose.

Many articles and books propose that women can advance if they change themselves and learn to play by men's rules. Kanter (1977) disputes the individual model of work behaviour where women must change to fit into the present structure. She feels that this type of thinking promotes women seeing themselves as the problem. She believes that the organization, not the individual, needs to be changed.

> Understanding more fully the structural conditions that impact on human behaviour in organizations, we can then choose more appropriately policies and programs to improve the quality of work life and promote equal employment opportunity. Understanding guides action. And action on women's work issues may be critically important for the future of American society as a whole. (Kanter, 1977, p. 264)

Kanter says creating opportunities for office workers is a structural problem that can be resolved. The first step that needs to be taken is to determine the duties for the various office positions so differences can be distinguished and jobs placed in a hierarchy. Kanter suggests that this hierarchy could be established by interviewing clerical workers to determine the actual duties being performed. Then a comprehensive job description that lists the competencies required and opportunities available needs to be written.

Kanter's second step involves implementing a system where office workers receive feedback on their performance. This feedback is not an evaluation in the usual sense but more for the purpose of counselling employees so that they might improve themselves and grow with the company. Kanter states that this requires managers who are "trained in people-development skills." In order for this to happen, the company has to reward managers who can inspire and encourage talent. However, Kanter does note the dangers involved if this appraisal system is used to control rather than facilitate employee growth.

> At the same time that women and other typically low mobility workers can come to see themselves, through job description and performance appraisal process, as more mobile and "marketable" than they had thought, the organization itself will now have a pool of information on the skills and talents of employees to whom little attention had previously been paid. (p. 270)

Before women entered the clerical field, men used the position as a stepping stone into management. Kanter suggests a return to this concept. Secretaries should be apprentices to their bosses, and bosses should be responsible for training secretaries to move up the corporate ladder. In order to make this system work, bosses need to be evaluated and rewarded for grooming secretaries for advancement. In this scenario, secretaries would be chosen for talent and managerial skills which, in turn, would increase the prestige and respect the profession receives. As the door to management opens, men would be more likely to enter the field.

Kanter says that in the business world secretaries are not encouraged to obtain the skills required for higher positions. For example, many times secretaries are rewarded for skills that are not conducive to management. Rather than learning to make decisions, broaden their skills, take risks, and set long-range goals, they learn to be submissive, specialized, timid and to live day-by-day.

Cultural Influences Affecting Pay for Secretaries

Since equal pay for equal work laws have been implemented, there is the belief that pay discrimination has been eliminated. Even though these laws have gone a long way towards eliminating wage discrimination, it still exists.

There needs to be equal pay for work of comparable worth. "Men and women should receive comparable salaries for jobs that are not the same but that require equivalent overall effort, skill, responsibility, and working conditions" (Ferarro, 1984, p. 1169).

People have been lulled into accepting the myth that there is no discrimination in pay where, in fact, in 1983 "women earn fifty-nine cents for every dollar paid to men" (Grune, 1983, p. 395). The main reason equal pay for equal work laws have not reduced the wage gap is that the majority of women do not hold the same jobs as men. "The concentration of women in a narrow range of overwhelmingly female-dominated jobs, which, not incidentally, pay low wages, is the most important cause of the wage gap" (Grune, 1983, p. 396). Findings in a study by the National Academy of Sciences in the United States suggests that "only a small part of the earnings differences between men and women can be accounted for by differences in education, labour force experience, labour force commitment, or other human capital factors believed to contribute to productivity differences among workers" (Grune, 1983, p. 397). "It is estimated that if women were paid the same wages that similarly qualified men earn, the number of families living in poverty would be cut in half" (Ferraro, 1984, p. 1166).

Ferraro describes the concept of the “invisible hand” that moves the labour market so that the value of jobs is freely derived. Ferraro argues against this notion by illustrating what happens when the number of people in an occupation changes from being predominantly male to predominantly female. She gives the example of how the pay for bank tellers decreased after World War I when the occupation became dominated by women. Once occupations become predominantly female, the pay appears to drop dramatically and the job becomes a dead-end position.

> The real problem with the "free market theory" is that we are not really operating in a free market in which all individuals have equal access to employment opportunities and persons are compensated on the basis of their productivity or the value of their work. Instead, we are operating in a system that systematically excludes women from certain segments of the market and confines them to a narrow range of jobs that, as a class, are undervalued and underpaid. (Ferraro, p. 1168)

Ferraro feels that the same discrimination that does not value work in the home is at work in the workplace. For instance dog attendants, mostly male, are paid more than child care workers, who are mostly female. She feels that the wage gap is a result of conflicting values in society. One value is that individuals should be paid on the basis of skill, effort, and responsibility and not on the basis of race, sex, or age. However, another value is that women's jobs are not valued by the same standards as jobs held by men. Ferraro quotes the National Academy of Sciences that found:

> ...not only do women do different work than men, but also the work women do is paid less, and the more an occupation is dominated by women, the less it pays. (p. 1168)

Treiman prepared a report for the Committee on Occupational Classification and Analysis and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission that found "three features of formal job evaluation procedures that render problematic their utility for job worth assessment in a labour force highly segregated by sex" (Bellak, 1983, p. 421). The first one is that the ranking of jobs is dependent upon which factors are used in the evaluation and how heavily each factor is weighed.

Second, is that "job evaluation is inherently subjective, making it possible that well-known processes of sex-role stereotyping will be operative in this context as well, resulting in an underevaluation of jobs held predominantly by women" (Bellak, p. 421). Bellak says that in recent years computers have been used for job evaluation and have been labelled as "objective." He says that even though the computer scores all the evaluations in the same manner, the evaluations are still subjective because they are scored based on the values of the people who develop the "so-called objective system."

Treiman's third feature is that "many employers use several job evaluation plans -- one for shop jobs, one for office jobs, etc. -- a procedure that makes it impossible to compare the worth of jobs in different sectors of a firm" (Bellak, p. 421). These multiple evaluation systems exist because different areas have different value systems. Steven Neuse, in an exhaustive review of the comparable worth debate, gives three underlying factors which contribute to the wage gap:

> 1. Women continue to be channelled into certain occupations, because of biased educational systems, continued occupational segregation, or because of socialization-based assumptions about what women can and should do.
>
> 2. Female jobs are consistently rated lower than male jobs because of biased evaluation procedures (informal or formal) which tend to give more weight to factors more common to male than female jobs.
>
> 3. Even when female jobs are judged to be equal to (or of greater worth than) male jobs, such jobs often pay less because of employer reliance on commonly biased market factors (Steel, 1987, p. 25).

Researchers reviewing the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (Makela, 1985) found discrimination was "most apparent in those jobs that require mothering and homemaking skills, jobs in education, health, and welfare work" (p. 14). Researchers gave three reasons why female-dominated jobs were given low skill ratings:

1. the work was underrated
2. the work was ignored
3. women's work was made to seem unskilled by the DOT's definition of specific vocational preparation (Makela, p. 14)

The Committee on Occupational Classification and Analysis stated "the wage rates of jobs traditionally held by women are depressed relative to what they would be if women had equal opportunity in the labour market" (Makela, 1985, p.15).

We need to take into consideration that the hierarchies of what jobs are worth are a reflection of values (Bellak, p. 422). The values society has, therefore, affect which skills are viewed as important and worth more pay. Traditionally, our society has undervalued women's work.

The Changing Workplace

According to Carnevale (1990) the nature of the workplace is changing. Changing competitive standards, new technologies, and flattening of organizational structures have altered the skills required by the workforce. Carnevale says that globalization requires businesses to respond with new approaches to competition. For example, Japanese and European businesses have found a market by giving customers products that provide variety and customization.

In a market where supply is greater than demand, the old idea that productivity and price are the only factors to be considered is no longer relevant. In order to survive, North American businesses need to switch from restricted product lines and rigid production processes if they are to stay competitive. There must be a change in emphasis from mass production with unskilled labour to a labour force and production system that is flexible and adaptable with little downtime.

Now, in order to have a competitive edge, businesses must consider other factors such as quality of the product and availability to customers. To be competitive, workers need to be flexible, willing to adapt to the technology and capable of making decisions. The new economy uses technology and labour as resources. Businesses must restructure jobs, organizations, and the skills required by the workers.

Skills Employers Want in the 90s

A 30-month study conducted by The American Society for Training and Development[1] (Carnevale, 1990), and research conducted by The Corporate Council on Education for the Conference Board of Canada (1996) have yielded information about the skills employers are looking for in the 90s. The American

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[1] A non-profit professional association representing approximately 50,000 practitioners, managers, administrators, educators, and researchers in the field of human resource development.

Society for Training and Development found seven skills groups that are basic to success in the workplace:

1) learning to learn
2) basic skills
3) communication skills
4) adaptability skills
5) developmental skills
6) group effectiveness skills
7) influencing skills

1) **Learning to Learn**. Knowing how to learn is the key for future success in the changing business world.

2) **Basic Skills**. Reading, writing and computation skills have always been important, but they are becoming even more important as essential skills for employees. With computers taking on the more mundane and repetitious operations, workers are required to perform higher level jobs.

While reading in school is designed to teach discrete skills, reading for the workplace should be based on workers being able to accomplish job-related reading tasks. The teaching of writing skills for the workplace should center on writing tasks actually used in the workplace. In addition, computation skills involve not only teaching mathematical skills, but also instruction in problem solving skills that allow for transfer from one situation to another.

3) **Communication Skills**. Central to the smooth operation of any business are good communication skills. Essential elements of training in oral

communication are awareness and understanding of our own dominant style of communication, the ability to understand and value different communication styles, and the ability to adjust one's personal style to the styles of others. Essential elements of training in listening skills are to adapt the style of listening to fit the situation and the content of the message being conveyed, to reduce barriers or interference that may impede the communication process, and to listen actively.

4) **Adaptability Skills**. Research on the nature of work has shown that not only have literacy requirements increased but that critical thinking is becoming increasingly more important in the performance of most jobs. In a world that is constantly changing, employees must have the skills to adapt to change. Employers are realizing that, in order to be competitive, employees must develop problem-solving and creative thinking skills.

5) **Development Skills**. "A strong foundation of skills in self-esteem, motivation/goal setting, and employability/career development influences the behaviour, attitudes, and desires of workers and ultimately contributes to an organization's ability to carry out its mission and strategies" (Carnevale, 1990, p. 211). A positive self-concept gives a worker a strong foundation on which she/he can achieve her/his potential in the workplace. In order to be

successful in the workplace, workers need to be motivated both internally and externally.

6) **Group Effectiveness**. To perform work roles effectively, workers need skills such as interpersonal, teamwork and negotiation skills.

7) **Influencing Skills**. In order to influence the inner workings of their organization, workers need organizational and leadership skills.

The Conference Board of Canada (1996) found similar skills required by the Canadian workforce. They are academic skills (communication, thinking, learning), personal management skills (positive attitudes and behaviours, responsibility, adaptability), and teamwork skills (working with others).

The Changing Role of Secretaries

The most recent technology affecting the office is the personal computer. Lower prices, increased capabilities, and networking now make word processing and data processing accessible to most employees. Because personal computers are so readily available, more and more managers are keying in their own documents. By typing directly onto their own terminals they can view, edit and update the copy and have the document in final form without any delays. With managers taking on more responsibility for producing draft copies of their work, office workers have been assigned other tasks (Cohen, 1987). As a result, there is an increased blurring of roles between clerical staff and management (Fenner, 1994). A study commissioned by Professional Secretaries International confirms the existence of this process: a "professionalization of the clerical staff" and a "clericalization of the professional staff" where everyone in the workplace handles their own phone work, files and correspondence (Fenner, 1994, p. 12).

There are conflicting opinions about the ways in which technology will affect office workers. Deschenes (1988) takes a positive stance claiming that secretaries will take on expanded roles. Deschenes position is supported by the results of a survey of 170 PSI members conducted by the Administrative Development Institute. This survey showed that, "since 1990, 71% of the respondents have been assigned projects or duties previously handled by management" (Wood, 1994, p. 28). The U.S. Office of Technology Assessment (1986) states that automation could either broaden a secretary's role to include management duties, or it could encourage employers to simplify and narrow jobs so that office workers acquired fewer skills in the organization. Whether or not office positions are deskilled or enhanced is determined to a large extent by the ways in which management decides to implement these technologies. Krahn (1993) supports the notion that workers are affected not by automation, but by how people implement automation.

The Research in Office Technology

Research in office technology curriculum can be classified under two paradigms: positivistic and naturalistic. This section is subdivided into positivistic and naturalistic research paradigms.

Positivistic Research

Positivistic research in education has frequently been called "applied research." Its purpose is to advance scientific knowledge. Most research in business education and office technology over the past two decades has been positivistic research. It has been primarily descriptive, providing a means for answering questions about the state of "current employment needs, job requirements, or judgements about the relative importance of different program outcomes." (Lambrecht, 1990, p. 117) The reasons for the prominence of this type of research in business education are two-fold: (1) the requirements of the business world are constantly changing and (2) the overwhelming amount of business content requires priorizing (Lambrecht, 1990).

Knowledge Gained from Positivistic Research. Because the business world is constantly evolving as a result of technology, many studies have been conducted to determine the competencies required by secretaries. From these competencies, curricula for office technology programs have been derived. Most studies use survey questionnaires sent to employers of secretaries. Mott (1988) found employers rated the following factors as important: statistical typing, interpersonal relations, telephone communications, typing from hard copy, and data entry. Mott's study also revealed that employers supported a secretarial internship. Arneson (1989) found that, in addition to traditional office skills, employers required secretaries to be able to work with technology. Ewing (1991) sought to identify future competencies required by secretaries and found the competencies that received the highest ratings were personal characteristics, communications skills, and basic skills. Henderson (1992) found that employers wanted secretaries with exceptional telephone skills, good public contact skills, and good English communication skills -- individuals who could read, follow instructions, think, reason, and work independently. Moore (1993) examined the competencies required in clerical and secretarial positions and discovered the most important competency appeared to be interpersonal skills. LaSalle (1994) determined from a survey of national leaders in the business education field that computer and applications skills need to be emphasized in secretarial programs.

As detailed as positivistic research can be, it tends to be narrowly focused and highly repetitive. For example, there is a concern that research to determine competencies required by employers for clerical and secretarial workers could overlap with research already conducted. For example, both The American Society for Training and Development (1990) and The Conference Board of Canada (1996) have published documents discussing the skills employers want.

Naturalistic Research

Lambrecht (1990) makes the differentiation between positivistic research and naturalistic research. The former "refines" and the latter "reconstructs" (pp. 118-119). Ethnographic or interpretative research is reconstructive in that it focuses on "doing the right things" within the current situation. Ethnographic research often "asks about goals, purposes, and meanings and explores the possibility of fundamental changes in the ends/means relationships of the existing systems" (Lambrecht, 1990, p. 118-119). By centering on "broader social contexts and personal meanings and interpretations" (Lambrecht, 1990, p. 119), ethnographic or interpretative methods of inquiry can aid in answering "ends" questions such as "the place of business education in education."

Knowledge Gained from Naturalistic Research. Valli (1986), Gaskell (1986), Gaskell and Riecken (1988), Beebe (1988), and McConaghy (1990) conducted naturalistic research in Business Education, or Office Technology. Valli (1986) uses an ethnographic approach to the question, "Why would students consciously prepare themselves to become office workers?" (p. 3) in light of present dissatisfaction with the position. Valli describes the experiences (both at school and at work) of students in a high school business education co-op program. She includes an explanation of why students were in the program and what they were learning at school and at work about women's paid and unpaid labour. Valli analyzes the processes through which women learn to be "productive, loyal and subordinate employees" (p. 186-187) and, from observations in the classroom and the working situation, she describes how both places encourage in students "a docile respect for authority" (p. 485).

Gaskell (1986) conducted research over four months in the Business Department at a high school. The research involved observation of Business Education classes; interviewing Business Education students, teachers, guidance counsellors and the Business Education coordinator; and examination of course outlines, texts and other materials. Graduates of high school Business Education programs were having difficulty acquiring employment so teachers, in an attempt to attract new students, changed the emphasis of the program. Vocational content was de-emphasized and living skills emphasized. Gaskell (1986) states that, because the Business Education curriculum is strongly influenced by teachers' efforts to prepare students as acceptable future employees, "the social and ideological relations of the workplace inside the classroom is ensured" (p. 435).

Gaskell and Riecken (1988) interviewed women from two clerical training programs and found there were many contradictions between what the students were taught and what the reality of clerical work turned out to be. Many students resolved this contradiction by returning to school in an attempt to improve their opportunities. Gaskell and Riecken said this response buys into the dominant ideology of studying, working hard and getting ahead. However, women in clerical positions often confront barriers that prevent their skills from being recognized. Beebe (1988) sought to uncover the hidden assumptions in a typewriting class by using a qualitative approach. During a seven-month time frame, Beebe interviewed participants informally and formally, observed typewriting classes and collected related documents. The main theme of the study was the relationship of the ritual process to the typewriting class.

McConaghy (1990) used hermeneutical analysis to push discussion with high school business education teachers and students beyond the 'taken-for-granted' so as to come to a better understanding of the notion of work that is presented in the business education classrooms.

Conclusions

Even though the workplace and the role of the secretary have altered, many people's perceptions of the secretary stem from a time when our culture did not value women. Due to technology and automation, the role of the secretary is evolving. Less time is now spent performing repetitive tasks and secretaries now have the opportunity to take on more administrative tasks. In addition, the workplace is changing as are the skills required by employees. The skill level required by employees has risen. Employees in the 90s need to be flexible so they can adapt to changing technology. They need good problem-solving, creative thinking, communication and interpersonal skills. Secretarial curricula need to take into account the changes that are taking place in the secretarial position and in the business world.

Most of the research in business education or office technology over the past 20 years has been positivistic. Even though descriptions of the competencies required by office workers is important, there needs to be naturalistic research that takes into account other factors that affect curriculum.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to reveal the functional curriculum and to examine the different levels of curriculum (according to Dodds, 1983 as modified by Hopper, 1993), a qualitative research approach was used. Qualitative research is an umbrella term for different research strategies that share common attributes:

1. The setting is the natural setting and the research instrument is the researcher who goes to the natural setting so the context of the research is not disrupted (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982).

2. Qualitative research involves description. Instead of reducing data to numbers as in quantitative research, the researcher tries to capture the "richness" of the data as it was lived by the participants. "The qualitative approach demands that the world be approached with the assumption that nothing is trivial, that everything has the potential of being a clue which might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982, p. 28).

3. Qualitative research is not confined to end results but is also concerned with process and with questions such as "How do people negotiate meaning? How do certain terms and labels come to be applied? and How do certain notions come to be taken as part of what we know as 'common sense'?" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982, p. 28).

4. There is the tendency for qualitative researchers to analyze data inductively. Rather than a top down approach, theories emerge from the bottom up (Bogdan and Biklen, 1983).

5. The major focus of qualitative research is understanding "meanings." The researcher seeks to discover how the participants view the situation (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982).

Qualitative research has the potential to offer a new perspective on office technology education. Through qualitative research, questions which have been ignored by researchers in the past can be asked and hopefully answered.

The type of qualitative research selected for this study employs an interpretive approach that defines culture as "the shared knowledge that societies use to guide action and to explain behaviour" (Dobbert, 1982, p. 128). In this study, the culture of the Office Technology classroom was described by the participants.

An interpretive research approach can provide insight to instructors so they will have a better understanding of what is happening in the classroom. Data acquired from interpretive research can act as a mirror to help teachers see what they are doing in the classroom, making explicit those features of teaching which are often taken for granted. Through understanding and reflecting about the information uncovered through interpretive research, suggestions for improvement in the curriculum can be made.

In this study, curriculum is viewed as a process involving the every day interactions between instructors and students in the classroom. The methodological tools of interpretive research provide a vehicle for a deeper exploration of the classroom experience because the researcher can examine the situation and share in the meanings that the participants take for granted. The researcher can then analyze and describe the meanings so that the reader will gain a new understanding (Bodgan and Biklen, 1982).

Choosing the Situation

The site for the study was a small (approximately 2000 students) community college in western Canada. I selected this site because, as a long-time employee, I found it readily accessible to me. By conducting the research at a college where I was known, I had the advantage of not being an "outsider." And because I was known and had as one of my goals improving the curriculum for the benefit of the program, I was granted open entry.

Participants in the Study

The prime participants in the study were five office technology instructors, six full-time students, eight employers and four secretaries. In addition, fifty Office Technology students and eight secretaries wrote essays on their perceptions of a secretarial job.

Two full-time and three part-time instructors in the Office Technology Program were interviewed. The six Office Technology students interviewed were selected because of their willingness to commit to the research. Traditionally, the students in the Office Technology Program at this college have fallen into two groups: students who enter from high school and students who wish to re-enter the workforce after taking time out to raise families. Student participants were selected from each of these groupings. In addition, fifty Office Technology students wrote essays on their perceptions of the secretarial field.

Eight employers of secretaries were interviewed. Male and female employers who represented both public and private industry were selected. Four secretaries who are graduates of the Office Technology Program were also interviewed. Eight secretaries wrote essays on their perceptions of the secretarial field. Some of these secretaries had graduated from the Office Technology Program and others had developed their expertise "on the job" or with other educational institutions.

Pilot Studies

Pilot Study 1: From February through March, 1990, a pilot study of an office in an educational institution was conducted. The purpose of the study was two-fold. First, I wished to become better acquainted with the research potential of an office setting. Second, I wanted the opportunity to practice ethnographic research skills.

Pilot Study 2: From May through June, 1990, a pilot study with the office staff of a government office was conducted. This study consisted of observing the secretarial staff and interviewing each staff member five times. This study gave me the opportunity to further refine my ethnographic research skills.

Pilot Study 3: From January, 1991 through April, 1991, a pilot study with three office technology students and one office technology instructor was conducted. This involved several interviews with the students and the instructor over the semester. Information gained from this study helped me prepare for the major field study conducted during the 1992-93 college year.

These pilot studies helped me to refine my questioning techniques and to realize the importance of analyzing data while interviewing.

Data Collection

The major field study took place between September, 1992 and August, 1993. Methodological triangulation was used. The following multiple methods were used in this study: observation; in-depth interviewing of the participants;

and the reading of participants' journals, essays, my own research journal and written documentation for the program and courses. According to Patton (1987), triangulation solves the problem of putting too much reliance on a single data source which could undermine the validity and credibility of the findings.

Observation

According to Patton (1987) a strength of naturalistic program observations is that "the data is collected in the field, where the action is, where it happens" (p. 72). This is supported by Guba & Lincoln:

> Observation....maximizes the inquirer's ability to grasp motives, beliefs, concerns, interest, unconscious behaviours, customs, and the like; observation .... allows the inquirer to see the world as his subjects see it, to live in their time frames, to capture the phenomenon in and on its own terms, and to grasp the culture in its own natural, ongoing environment. (1981, p. 193)

Patton (1987) gives six advantages to using observation. First, by understanding the context of the situation, the researcher gets a holistic perspective. Second, the researcher, by experiencing the program, can use an inductive approach. Third, the trained eye of a researcher may capture what has escaped conscious awareness by participants. Fourth, the researcher can gain information about sensitive issues that participants may not be willing to discuss in an interview situation. Fifth, the researcher can go beyond the perceptions of the people being interviewed and give a more comprehensive interpretation of the program being studied. Finally, the understandings the researcher gains through first-hand experience can help in the interpretation and analysis of the data (pp. 73-74).

I gained a better understanding of an office technology program by observing Office Technology classes in Accounting, Typewriting, Introduction to Business, Introduction to Computers, Office Procedures and Business English. By observing Office Technology classes, I had a starting point for questions asked during the interviews.

Interviews

Interviews can build on observations and become a source of understanding and elaboration. According to Patton (1987) "depth interviewing probes beneath the surface, soliciting detail and providing a holistic understanding of the interviewee's point of view" (p. 108). Interviewing allows the interviewer to "enter another person's world, to understand that person's perspective" (Patton, 1987, p. 109). The interviewer is responsibile for creating a setting in which the interviewee can bring the interviewer into his or her world.

Ten interviews with each of six student participants and six interviews with each of five instructors were conducted. All interviews were tape-recorded and were conducted in an office at the college at times convenient to both the interviewer and interviewee.

The first set of interviews with the students and instructors in the Office Technology Program followed an informal conversational interview format (Patton, 1987). In an informal conversational interview there is a spontaneous exchange of ideas in natural interactions. This procedure allowed me to be highly responsive to individuals and able to pursue what the individuals felt was important. Even though this process was very time-consuming and made the process for finding patterns more onerous, it allowed me to determine from the participants what they felt were the important issues.

Once I had established a direction for the research, I then used the general interview guide approach (Patton, 1987) which employs a general list of questions. I was still able to follow different leads in the conversations, but the list served as a checklist for all the topics covered in the interview.

In addition to interviewing students and instructors, I interviewed four secretaries four times. These women were graduates of the Office Technology Program. The interviews were either conducted in a college office after the secretaries had finished work or in the homes of the secretaries. I followed the same format as when I interviewed the students and instructors, using both informal conversational and general interview guide formats.

I also interviewed eight employers of office workers to determine their perceptions regarding office workers. All these interviews were conducted at their place of business during working hours. Because I did not want to waste the employers' time, I used a more standardized open-ended question interview approach. I followed a pre-written set of questions.

Document Sources

Once initial themes had emerged from the interviews with the students and the general direction the research was determined, 50 Office Technology students were asked to write essays on their perceptions of a secretary before starting the program and then again during the program. In addition, eight secretaries from different sectors in the community were asked to write essays on their perceptions of a secretarial job.

The college instructors and students were asked to maintain a journal during the period the research took place. I also maintained a field journal divided into three parts: a record of daily activities, a personal log, and a log containing the methods used in conducting the research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

The following documents were also collected for analysis: course outlines, textbooks, a sampling of teacher lesson plans and the college calendar.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Analysis and interpretation are separate processes. According to Patton (1987), analysis is "the process of bringing order to data, organizing what is there into patterns, categories and basic descriptive units" (p. 144), whereas interpretation "involves attaching meaning and significance to the analysis, explaining descriptive dimensions" (p. 144).

Simultaneous Data Collection and Analysis

Collection and analysis of data is not a linear process where collection ends and analysis begins. As data were being collected, hunches and insights in the fieldnotes were recorded. In addition, once initial themes came to the surface, additional interviews were conducted to seek answers to questions which had not been asked of some participants.

> ....if data collection and processing go on more or less simultaneously, later data collection efforts can be directed more specifically at fleshing out categories, filling in gaps in the larger taxonomy or category set, clearing up anomalies or conflicts, and extending the range of information that can be accommodated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 343).

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967) if theorizing takes place during data collection, a greater chance exists that the integration of the theory will emerge by itself.

Transcription

All interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed as soon as possible using word processing. Transcripts were saved on both computer hard drive and backup diskettes and hard copies were printed and stored in a binder.

Scanning and Noting

Upon reading the hard copy, highlighted points were noted and commented upon in the margins. The data were read and reread in a search for themes and gaps. Hunches and questions were noted in the field notes.

Developing Categories

All transcripts of student interviews were photocopied onto colored paper. Each color matched a particular student. I then read through the transcripts and tried to categorize the information. After coding all the transcripts with the corresponding categories, they were cut into parts, sorted into like categories and placed into appropriately labeled envelopes. At times, pieces of information seemed to fit into two categories so these were photocopied and placed in the appropriate envelopes.

The process was repeated for the instructors. The information in each envelope was read and reread. Categories seemed very scattered with few common links. In addition, the students' perceptions before the program and the instructors' perceptions often opposed one another. Even though the categories initially appeared unconnected, I felt there had to be a common thread that organized the information.

Analysis and Interpretation

Spradley (1980) says that "analysis is a search for patterns" (p. 85). Thinking through the various relationships among the categories helped me to see a common thread. After creating, through interpretations, a common thread in the responses from students and instructors in the Office Technology Program, I then asked 50 office technology students to write their essays. Eight secretaries were also asked to write essays on their perceptions of a secretarial job. In addition, secretaries and employers were interviewed to determine their perceptions.

In addition, Dodds' theoretical framework as modified by Hopper (1993) was used to analyze the curriculum materials and data and to help uncover the themes. Themes are principles (tacit or explicit) that are recurrent in a number of domains (Spradley, 1980) and that also serve as a relationship among sub-systems. Spradley states that most themes remain at the tacit level of knowledge.

> Themes come to be taken for granted, slipping into that area of knowledge where people are not quite aware or seldom find need to express what they know. This means that the ethnographer will have to make inferences about the principles that exist. (Spradley, p. 143)

Based on the knowledge gained from observation, from interviewing, and from the artifacts people use, the researcher tries to go one step further to discover hidden meanings. I met with two curriculum experts and discussed my research as a means of finding the hidden meanings of the data. After a brainstorming session, ideas were put on cue cards and arranged and rearranged to try to find a pattern. Finally a pattern took shape, and I saw what I had not seen before, even though I had been teaching in the Office Technology area for thirteen years. I then constructed an outline and met with the two experts. They recognized that I was finally analyzing the data at a deeper level and asked me to "flesh out" the items on the outline. As I enlarged the outline, I moved and rearranged data. After receiving approval for the detailed outline, I met with one of the experts and we discussed the outline. At points throughout the discussion the expert would ask me to give examples to make my points clearer. This conversation was tape recorded. After transcribing the conversation with the expert and reading additional information on the topics to be covered in the analysis, I finally began to write up the findings of the research.

Problem of Trustworthiness

Naturalistic research needs to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the inquiry so that the reader will accept the findings as credible. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe four criteria for meeting the trustworthiness criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility

Prolonged length of time in the field, persistent observation and triangulation are activities which increase the likeliness of credible findings. Prolonged time in the field requires that a researcher spend enough time in the field to learn the "culture," to be informed enough to be able to detect distortions, and to establish trust with the participants. Persistent observation is necessary to help the researcher identify what is relevant and to center on those details. When people refer to triangulation, they are usually referring to multiple sources. Multiple sources can mean either "multiple copies of one type of source" or "different methods for collecting data such as interviewing, using questionnaires, observing or testing or using different types of designs" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, pp. 305-306).

In this study class observation, document analysis, and informal and formal interviewing were used. I checked to see that the information gathered could be verified from more than one source and that it was consistent with what had been observed.

One of the most important methods of checking for credibility is a member check. A member check involves returning to the participants and checking to assure that the data and analysis are correct. In the final interview, I checked with the participants to assure that the analysis that applied to their situations made sense to them.

Dependability

In order to show that a study is dependable, Lincoln & Guba (1985) propose an inquiry audit which is metaphorically based on the fiscal audit (p. 317). The inquiry audit requires an auditor to examine the process of inquiry and determine the dependability of the inquiry. An outsider, who was a business education teacher, conducted an audit trail for me. This audit trail ensured the findings were grounded in the data, that the appropriate labels had been used and that researcher bias was kept to a minimum.

Confirmability

In order to enable the audit, adequate records were kept. Following the six Halpern audit trail categories (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), records of the following were kept:

1. raw data - electronically recorded materials, transcriptions of the tape recorded materials, students' and instructors' journals, documents and records, my field notes and journal.
2. summaries of field notes and theoretical notes (including hunches and hypotheses)
3. data reconstruction (themes and relationships), findings, conclusion
4. journal notes relating to methodology
5. journal notes relating to personal notes
6. instrument development information such as preliminary schedules and interview questions.

The use of the audit trail enabled me to attach priorities to data that would have remained undifferentiated until the writing stage of the research.

Transferability

I tried to provide 'thick description' so that there would be transferability from this case study to other contexts. According to Lincoln & Guba (1985):

> It is, in summary, *not* the naturalist's task to provide an *index* of transferability; it is his or her responsibility to provide the *data base* that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers (p. 316).

Ethical Considerations

I followed the University of Alberta Research Ethics Review Policies and Procedures and understood that ethical arrangements made to protect participants in the study must follow the guidelines. The following procedures were followed:

1. Organizational endorsement
    a. The purpose and nature of the study were explained to the Dean, Academic at the college where the study was to take place. Approval for the study was obtained from the Dean.
    b. The purpose and nature of the study were explained to the Chairperson of the Business Department who oversees the Office Technology Program where the study was to take place. Approval for the study was obtained from the Chairperson.
2. Informed consent of participants
    a. The purpose and nature of the research was explained to all the participants.
    b. Participants were given the opportunity to get clarification as to their role in the research.
    c. Participation in the study was voluntary.
3. Rights of participants
    a. Participants were told that they could withdraw from the research at any time during the study.
    b. Participants were asked if the interviews could be taped recorded and interviews were only recorded after participants gave their consent.

   c. Participants were given the opportunity to make any changes to the transcribed interview data.

4. Anonymity and confidentiality issues

   a. The names of the participants were not revealed in the study.

   b. Any information that might have disclosed the identity of the participants was withheld.

5. Protecting participants from harm

   a. All information collected through observation or interviewing was held as confidential.

   b. Participants were aware that quoted information would be anonymous.

   c. Transcribed notes, fieldnotes, back-up computer diskettes were kept in a secure place accessible only to me. Files on computer hard drive were given password codes so only I had access to them.

6. The Ethics Committee approved the study.

Time Line

Pilot studies were conducted between January and April, 1991, and then the major field study was conducted between September, 1992 and August, 1993. Even though some analysis was conducted while the data were being collected, the formal analysis took place from April, 1994, to August, 1995.

CHAPTER FOUR

AGENDAS

Dodds' (1983) model of curriculum analysis as modified by Hopper (1993) was used as a framework to analyze the Office Technology curriculum. This model implies that both student and teacher agendas affect curriculum. Because a secretarial program's curriculum is also influenced by the business community, I added to this model of curriculum analysis the "Business Agenda." The student, teacher, and business agendas will be investigated throughout the remainder of this chapter.

Student Agenda

In Chapter One a number of questions to focus and direct the data gathering were provided. One set of questions was as follows: "What were the students' perceptions of a secretarial position before they began the Office Technology Program? What were the students' expectations of the Office Technology Program?" Issues arising from these questions will be explored in the remainder of this section.

For most students entering the Office Technology Program, their goal was to develop the skills required to work in a business office. Their beliefs about the role of a secretary and what they expected to acquire from the Office Technology Program no doubt affected what the students actually learned while in the classroom. If their goals and expectations do not match those of the instructors, there is potential for conflict. To work effectively with students in the Office Technology Program, instructors must understand the student agenda.

Student Perceptions

All the students in the Office Technology Program are women. Of the six Office Technology students agreeing to in-depth interviews, four had attended high school within the last five years and two were mothers who had spent time raising their children and were now wishing to enter the workforce. These women all wanted to find employment without having to spend several years at college or university. Kate was influenced to take the program since both her sister and cousin had enjoyed the Office Technology Program at the college and now had good secretarial positions. Kate planned to get married the following summer and move to Calgary with her husband. Diane, a single woman in her early twenties, had worked in a grocery store following high school. Even though she had not been highly successful academically in high school, she had the pre-requisites for the Office Technology Program. Shannon, a single nineteen-year-old woman, had taken secretarial courses in high school. She worked at a fast-food restaurant while she applied for secretarial work. She applied everywhere but she could not get a job. She felt that if she took Office Technology, she would increase her chances of finding secretarial employment. Her job at the fast-food restaurant made her feel like a "nobody," and she knew she had to do something with her life. She had heard from a friend who had taken the Office Technology Program that the instructors in the program were very helpful and that the program was enjoyable so she decided to go to college and take the program.

Debbie, a married woman with three children, had spent the last six years at home raising her children. After her husband injured his back, the family had relied on Social Services' support. She was told by Social Services that she either had to return to school or get a part-time job. They told her she had to go through Canada Employment Centre (CEC) or Alberta Vocational Training (AVT) for sponsorship and that, if either of these agencies approved her for training, she would have to take it. Of the programs sponsored by Canada Employment Centre, the only one that interested Debbie was Office Technology. In the past, Debbie had worked as a waitress and as a sales clerk. She felt the Office Technology Program would place her in a better position and serve as a stepping stone to other areas.

Julie, a single parent with a nine-year-old son, had worked for seventeen years as a factory labourer. When the factory closed down, Julie took a General Aptitude test battery and the results pointed her in the direction of office work. She applied through the Canada Employment Centre for sponsorship. She was placed on a waiting list and had to wait a year before being sponsored. Jackie, a single parent, had become pregnant in grade ten and quit school. A year after her baby was born, Jackie came to college to take College Preparation. She then went to work as a waitress, a job she grew to hate. She had the background education for the Office Technology Program and liked the fact that the program was only one year long. Jackie felt she could take the program and then could return to the workforce as quickly as possible to support her child. Jackie saw secretarial work as more professional than waitressing.

In my interviews with the six Office Technology students profiled, I found that they had enrolled in the Office Technology Program because they wanted to acquire training so they could secure positions as secretaries. On the surface, this made perfect sense. An Office Technology Program prepares students to become secretaries, and this is what they wanted to do. However, through numerous discussions with the students, a more complex picture emerged. At first, the students were very clear that they wanted training to become secretaries and were defensive if asked questions about their intentions. They were equally defensive when asked if they might have had more choices had they been men. As we talked and as they became involved in their courses, they began to speak more freely and explore their true feelings. From random comments made by different students, a better understanding of what they really thought it meant to be a secretary was pieced together. I was intrigued not only by their perceptions but by how similar all six student perceptions were.

My curiosity was piqued. I wondered how the rest of the Office Technology students felt. Therefore, I asked 50 Office Technology students to reflect upon and describe their perceptions about the secretarial field as they started the program. The next section focuses on these perceptions.

"Just" a Secretary

Before entering the Office Technology Program, most students had the perception that a secretary was "just a secretary." How difficult can it be to answer the telephone and type?

> I originally thought that secretaries merely answered
> the phone, filed and typed correspondence.

Students felt that they had been influenced to think that a secretarial job would be undemanding, unrewarding, and only slightly more prestigious than a waitressing job. Some students thought that secretarial work was one of the easiest jobs available.

Even though most students did not view secretarial work as a demanding or exciting job, some felt it would definitely be an improvement from their previous occupations.

> My image of a secretary was that all she had to do was type, and answer the phone. I did not think that it would be a demanding or stressful job; however, I did feel it would be rewarding because I would be working a daytime job which is better than waiting tables for the rest of my life.

Some students, mainly those who had already been out in the workforce, had some inclination that being a secretary would be more involved than they originally believed.

> All of my life, I believed a secretary was that stereotypical woman portrayed in the movies. But I also always believed that there had to be something more to this woman who is the cornerstone of every office.

Even though this student suspected a secretary was more than the portrayal in the movies, she never believed the job would be prestigious. Her perception had been shaped by past attitudes about women and secretaries; she had been affected by the culture in which she lived where women's work was not considered to be very important. Even though she disagreed with this at one level, at another level she had unconsciously internalized these beliefs about secretaries.

If most students felt that secretarial work would not be exciting, challenging or prestigious, why would they enter secretarial training? Many women in our society believe that family should come first; they will consistently put their families' needs ahead of their own careers. Because it is more common for a woman to follow a man's career than for the reverse to occur, women will often choose a career that "fits in" with their family life. If their husbands work in a particular community, they will take training and eventually work there because they do not wish to go to a larger city and separate the family.

In our society, the woman's role is usually that of child-raiser rather than principal breadwinner. However, when parents separate, the woman usually receives custody of the children. As a single parent, a woman may feel that she needs to acquire marketable skills in a short period of time so she can care for her children.

> Being a single mother, I needed to get a career but not spend much time in school. I decided to take the Office Technology Program because everything that was offered was very interesting to me and what I needed to get back into the workforce with good qualifications.

Women sponsored by the Canada Employment Centre had few choices as to the programs they were allowed to take. The options most often recommended were the one-year Programs in Early Childhood Development or Office Technology.

Many students exiting high school expect to find a "Prince Charming" who will provide for them. Because they are certain they will eventually meet someone, marry and raise children, they look at work as a short-term necessity rather than as a life-time career.

Some students wanted a position that had day-time hours, since raising a family and working shiftwork was not an easy combination. They wanted a position where their working hours better matched their children's school hours and where they would be free in the evening to spend time with their children.

Some students saw secretarial work as an improvement from their previous jobs of waitressing or working retail. They felt that a secretarial position commanded more respect. A student who had waitressed in a restaurant to support herself and her child saw waitressing as a degrading job. She recounted why she had decided to return to school to take Office Technology. After working at a restaurant for a year without any hassles from her customers, a group of doctors she had served called the management and complained about her. They said she had not been in control of the table and that she had not been forceful enough. She said she had read the table wrong. She had found them intimidating and had assumed that they wished to be left alone. She said that their complaint could have resulted in her being fired. She was merely trying to support herself and her family, but since she was not in 'awe' of them, she almost got fired. She was upset at how little control she had over her life where one bad incident could have ruined her. At that point, she thought it was time to seek a better occupation.

All students interviewed had their own stories about why they were in the Office Technology Program. All believed it was their choice; however, they did not seem to realize that, as women, their choices were limited. Through stereotyping, women may be lead to believe that certain jobs are appropriate for them and other jobs are not. Whether the students realized it or not, these beliefs played a role in determining which occupations they would even consider. Even though women can go against the trend for occupations, it is not an easy path to take. These students may only have thought of positions that have traditionally been designated as women's work.

"Mickey Mouse" Program

Because most students believed that being a secretary would be easy, there was a natural assumption that learning how to become a secretary would be "a breeze." They expected the Office Technology Program to be a "Mickey Mouse" program.

> I essentially thought the program would be easy because I thought the job as a secretary was easy.

Most students thought that the Office Technology Program would not be that demanding since it would mainly involve using common sense. Students did not expect to do much homework or to spend much time studying.

> Prior to beginning the program, I believed it would be a "breeze." I assumed that business courses would require very little work; that it would all come very naturally.

A perception exists that anyone can be a secretary and that training is really not necessary. Because entry into secretarial positions is not restricted by education, anyone can call herself or himself a secretary. However, there is a difference between calling oneself a secretary and being a good secretary. For example, if teachers in the school system were not required to have a Bachelor of Education degree, people off the street could teach. One would hope, however, that those who had completed an education degree would be better prepared for the classroom.

An interviewed employer said she was amazed at how easily a graduate from the Office Technology Program had fitted into a supervisory position in her office. She said that there was a difference between the college Office Technology graduate and an employee who had come to work in her office after working in another medical office for years. The employee who had the work experience but not the education could do well at specific jobs that she had done in the past but did not seem to have an overall view of workings of the office and could not adapt as easily as the Office Technology graduate.

Employers sometimes feel that they can hire someone who does not have training in the field and then train them on the job. However, doing so takes time and money and the person often learns only a narrow range of skills. There is a perception that secretarial students take only typing and filing at college. Many people do not realize which courses the students actually take and how beneficial this background will be once the students are out on the job. In addition, many people do not know that the Office Technology Program can count as one year towards the two-year Business Administration Diploma Program.

Once a Secretary, Always a Secretary

Most students felt that "once a secretary, always a secretary." They did not see room for advancement because they did not fully understand what secretaries did or what their qualifications should be.

> What advancement? I didn't think that secretaries could go anywhere except to another office when they got tired of the one they were at.

Some students thought that secretaries remained in their positions for as long as they worked for the company. One student said she thought this because she had seen older women in some companies that looked like they had been there forever.

Students felt that secretaries did not have opportunities to advance but were often unable to pinpoint why they had this perception. Some felt secretaries could not advance because of the low regard many people have for them.

> Before starting the program, I thought that a secretary would always be a secretary with not much chance to advance to a higher position. I thought this because there are not too many people that think that a secretary is very smart or educated enough to be given advancement.

Students who felt there were possibilities for advancement thought that, if they started out as receptionists, they might get promoted to secretaries and then, if they were lucky and were at the company for a long, long time, they might become personal secretaries.

Low Respect Because It is an Easy Job

A general feeling among the students was that secretarial work received little respect because it is perceived to be an easy job.

> I did not think secretaries received very much respect because of the fact that people in society think it is an easy job and that anyone can answer the phone.

Many students felt that they had not respected secretaries in the past. According to some students, secretaries are seen by many as having "nothing" jobs, and this results in them being treated accordingly.

> I think that a lot of people see secretaries as being stupid women who pour coffee, answer the phone and

> file their nails at work. I don't think secretaries receive the respect they deserve.

Many students thought secretaries on television and in the movies were portrayed as "jumping" at the supervisor's every demand with much of their time spent bringing the supervisor coffee. From this perception, a few students had thought that secretaries were just glorified "go-fers."

> I thought secretaries were regarded as having little or no education. I thought all they did at work was the dirty work and were low man on the totem pole.

Other students had the perception from television and the movies that secretaries sat around most of the day, filing their nails or drinking coffee. They felt that the media portrayed them as neither hardworking nor intelligent.

Students felt that people accepted taking their anger out on a secretary even if she was not at fault because they had such low regard for secretaries. When these same people had the opportunity to see the boss who had made the original decision that had angered them, they treated the boss with respect. A few students had also seen instances when secretaries were "bawled out" by bosses and scolded like children.

Low Pay Because That's All a Secretarial Job Warrants

Most students in the Office Technology Program felt the pay was "about right." The most common response to questions concerning pay was that it was sufficient because the job was not very demanding.

> I always thought secretaries got minimum wage, and I thought it was just right too because they didn't do anything other than type out written memos and get coffee for the boss.

Students had the impression that secretaries were well paid for what they did and felt it was appropriate since secretaries had little responsibility. Some married students saw the salary as a supplementary rather than a primary income and were not overly concerned about the money. This income merely increased their standard of living.

Some students felt that in today's poor economy, secretaries should be happy just to have a job. For example, one student said, "I would rather have a job and minimal pay, than no job." Another student said, "In today's economy, you make do with whatever you get." Some students knew that, although they wouldn't become rich being secretaries, it would be a monetary step up from their previous job.

> When I had decided to take this course all I knew was that I could not be any worse off than I had been. I knew that as a secretary, I would make more money than in my previous job.

Other students who thought secretaries were underpaid felt it was unfair to pay people barely more than minimum wage if they had gone to school for training. A few students felt that secretaries must find it difficult to survive on the wages they are paid.

> Unless a secretary works at a government agency, such as City Hall, the college, or the Provincial Building, she won't receive much pay. This is very unfair since it is impossible to live on.

One student felt that women's jobs were seen as frivolous jobs--the second pay check that is not really needed. She also felt that this was unfair since this is not necessarily the case because many secretaries are single mothers or young women in starter positions who must survive on this money.

A few students were unaware of what a typical secretary's salary would be. A student added that, if the way secretaries dressed was any indication, one would think secretaries made a good salary.

Just Follow Orders

Almost all of the students felt that secretaries "just followed orders" and did as they were told.

> I mainly saw the secretary as being one that would follow orders that were given by the boss. I did not think that they were given the opportunity to give their views and opinions.

There was the feeling that secretaries mainly followed orders, not because they could not make decisions, but because their supervisors preferred to make all the decisions themselves. Students said they had acquired their beliefs about office decision-making from different avenues: from watching television and seeing how secretaries were treated on different television programs, from observing what happened in business offices, and from what other people had told them about secretaries.

A few students who had already been in the workforce thought secretaries made everyday decisions while bosses made the more important decisions.

> I used to imagine that a secretary would make routine, everyday decisions while the boss made the bigger more important decisions because the boss is usually in a better position to see the "bigger picture."

These students said that a secretary cannot be asking the boss questions every few moments. A secretary has to decide how to write a letter, establish priorities, organize the workload and make the office run more smoothly.

Many students entering the Office Technology Program are lacking in confidence. Some, having been out of the workforce for years raising their families and now wishing to re-enter the workforce, feel unsure of themselves. Others, not academically successful in high school, may also feel unsure of themselves. Because both these groups of students lack confidence and do not want to make mistakes, they prefer to be given explicit instructions. Clear instructions will help them do what is expected of them and give them the safety and security that goes with doing as they are directed. Having to make one's own decisions and having to decide the best course of action in a given situation requires a certain level of self-esteem. As students began the Office Technology Program, they wished and expected to be told exactly what to do and resisted instructors who encouraged them to make decisions.

It's a Job

Almost all of the students perceived a secretarial position as a job and not as a career. There were several reasons for this, the most common being that there was no room for advancement.

> I always saw the profession of secretary as a job because I thought it was a dead-end position.

Another reason for seeing the secretarial position as a job rather than a career was the fact that these positions do not always require training.

> I thought secretarial was a job because most people in my community are secretaries with no knowledge in the field; they just got the jobs. Many people seem to think if she can do that without even grade 12, so could I without any training.

Still another reason was the lack of knowledge about the position. For example, some students felt that a secretarial position was a job taken by a person who could not do anything better. They still had this misconception even as they entered the program. Some students said they would enrol in the program and secure a secretarial position until they decided what they really wanted to do.

Some students, on the other hand, viewed secretarial work as a "step up" from their previous occupations even if it was just a job. For example, one student said she did not see a secretarial job as a career but she saw it as a good move. Some students thought a secretarial job was a positive move since they had worked jobs that required shiftwork and required them to be on their feet all day. A few of the students did perceive a secretarial job as a career.

> I used to think the secretarial job was a career. I used to think that I would probably spend the rest of my working days as a secretary.

Because most of the students viewed a secretarial position as easy and unrewarding, they saw it only as a job. What makes one position a job and another position a career? A job can be seen as what is done to pay the bills: a means to an end. Working and earning money help to fulfil other areas in one's life. However, more is expected of a career. A person choosing a career hopes to find satisfaction, not only from the pay check, but from the job itself. Thus, most students did not expect to find secretarial work rewarding.

Caste System--It's Embarrassing To Admit One Is Training To Become a Secretary

The majority of the students questioned had received negative responses when they told people of their plans to enrol in the Office Technology Program to become secretaries. Many students were embarrassed to admit what they were studying.

> I did not tell most people that I was going into a secretarial program, because I was embarrassed.

Many students felt that most people they had encountered placed little importance on the role of secretary. Their responses were at least questioning if not totally negative about the field. Some students said that this negative reaction sometimes left them "embarrassed" and unsure as to whether they were doing the right thing.

> When I told people what I was going to college for, they replied "Oh, well that takes a lot of brains, couldn't you get into anything else!"

Comments like these made students feel inferior. One student said her friends made her feel as though she could not do anything else, as though she just wanted to study something easy. Another student said that some people made the comment that she would be "just a secretary." She said this made her angry because she was at least making something out of her life. She said, " At least I don't have an A&W burger job."

> When I tell people I am in the Office Technology Program, they just laugh and say how easy I must have it at school.

People said secretarial work had to be a breeze for "you can only type and answer the phones for so long before you get it right." Many students responded to reactions such as these as "Wrong!" Some students received mixed responses when they informed family and friends of their intentions.

> When I told people that I would be taking the secretarial course, some thought it would be a good idea since you could advance so easily. Others thought that it would be a waste of time since I could be a secretary without having this course.

A student in her late thirties, said:

> When the decision came about taking the secretarial Program, a lot of people thought that I was too old to get into this line of work. They said that "most offices only hire young, fresh girls right out of college."

She said that people made her feel as though she could not do it, but she was determined to give it a try.

Summary

Students entering the Office Technology Program see a secretarial position as being "just a secretary." Students expect secretarial preparation to lack rigor and are embarrassed to admit they are studying to be a secretary. They do not expect advancement opportunities or respect in the secretarial field since it is viewed as an easy job. Students envision having only to follow orders as directed by their supervisors and to make few if any decisions on their own.

Teacher Agenda

There are two full-time and three part-time Office Technology instructors at the main campus. The satellite campus has one full-time instructor and four part-time instructors. Only instructors at the main campus were formally interviewed.

A series of questions in Chapter One focused on the perceptions of instructors. The questions were as follows: "What were the instructors' perceptions of a secretarial job? What did the instructors view as being important to teach the students? Why was this viewed as important?"

Teacher Perceptions

Four of the five instructors in the Office Technology Program are women. Anne is an easy-going, married women in her early thirties with three children. After spending six years in Business Management, she completed a Bachelor of Arts Degree and is now working towards a Master's Degree in Business Education. Anne taught adult literacy at the college level before accepting a position in the Office Technology area. Dave is a divorced father of four who has a Master of Science degree with a major in Business Education. Dave has helped organize a chapter for Professional Secretaries International in the city. He had experience performing clerical tasks when he was in the navy. He also completed the Certified Professional Secretary (CPS) examination and received a CPS designation. Shirley, a teacher in her early thirties, recently became a mother. She has a Master of Science degree in Business Education and has taught at the elementary and senior high levels. Earlier in her career, Shirley worked in an office setting as a secretary. In addition, she passed the Certified Professional Secretary (CPS) examinations.

Wendy, a women in her mid-twenties with a Bachelor of Education degree in Business Education, taught junior and senior high school before coming to the college. Wendy had practical office experience working summers at a car dealership performing bookkeeping. Trinia, a young mother with two children, worked as a secretary in a legal office before earning a Bachelor of Education degree in Business Education. She also has teaching experience at the high school level.

The instructors in the program feel that their role is to prepare students for the business world. However, their vision of a secretary is different from the vision of the students entering the Office Technology Program. The next section focuses on these perceptions.

Creating a New Vision

All of the instructors intentionally work towards creating a 'new vision' of the secretary for the students. They think the program will influence students to think differently about themselves and about their vision of a secretary. The instructors want students to realize that a secretary is an important person in an office and at the same time they want students to acquire a better image of themselves. According to the instructors, students coming into the program, especially younger ones, often do not see the important role secretaries have. Some students, they feel, will not fully realize how important and essential a secretary is until they are in the workplace.

All the instructors believe that a secretary serves an important role in an office. One instructor describes the office as a wheel and the secretary as the hub through which everything passes and around which everything revolves. She feels that, without the secretary, the hub goes and the wheel falls apart. Another instructor thinks secretaries fulfil a need in business that is so crucial that businesses would crumble without them. Businesses need people to keep the activities organized and to keep information flowing through the proper channels. According to her, secretaries set and maintain the framework of business.

Building Confidence

All the instructors in the Office Technology Program work to develop students' self-confidence. For example, one instructor said:

> Self-confidence and self-esteem are really important. You need to believe that it is not a degrading position and that you won't let anyone degrade you....

This instructor believes that, by promoting confidence in students, teachers provide them with a tool to help them survive in their secretarial jobs.

> If students go into a job thinking my opinion of what a secretary is–that a secretary has a very important role–then it will be better for them when they start working. They will bring that attitude to the job.

This instructor is concerned that, if students leave thinking that secretarial work is a worthless job and that everyone dislikes secretaries, then that is probably how they will be treated. It will be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Another instructor said:

> I think we are setting them up to realize that an office can be a really exciting place to work; it doesn't have to be mundane. If they feel confident when they are confronted by a challenge, they can really enjoy the job and expand on it.

This instructor is concerned that, if students enter a job with a lack of confidence, they will feel all they can do is type a certain amount in a day; they will not have the confidence to know they can handle more; they will never progress and find satisfaction in their jobs.

Instructors hope that students will realize their potential and not let other factors stand in their way. For example, students are taught about sexual harassment, human rights, and fair treatment on the job so they will know their rights when they are in the workforce. If students work to their potential as secretaries, they should earn respect and become valued employees.

Advancement--The Sky's the Limit or It's a Ghetto

Opposing views were held among instructors on whether secretaries could or could not advance. Most of the instructors had worked, at some point, as secretaries and wanted their students to see that a secretarial job has the potential to be a career or, at least, the starting point for a career. For instance, secretaries can become executive assistants, personal assistants, or office managers. One instructor tells students that the skills acquired from this program will prepare them for an entry-level position. As they gain experience and take additional courses, they can expand their knowledge and grow in the position. An instructor emphasizes that becoming a secretary is a "foot in the door" for other opportunities and uses herself as an example. She started as an administrative assistant and now has a master's degree and teaches Office Technology. Another instructor feels that students should be able to advance if they take the initiative to continue to upgrade, put in overtime, and provide extra services over and above their job descriptions.

One instructor feels that realistically there are not many secretaries who actually advance, despite a few success stories.

> There just isn't upward mobility. Secretaries are really in a ghetto that they can't get out of. Where are they going to go? They are always working for someone else. There are the odd success stories. But those are the few success stories. But generally speaking overall, yes, it is a ghetto and you can't get out.

This instructor used the secretaries employed by the college as an example. For departmental secretaries, only a few positions exist to which they can advance, and not everyone can be the secretary for the president. Thus, this instructor saw most secretaries as trapped and bored in their positions.

Most of the instructors in the program think it is important that students believe they can advance if they so choose. This is part of the 'new vision' students must develop. If students believe that they can advance then, in all likelihood, it can happen. Instructors do not tell the students that everyone will advance but rather that, if they are willing to make sacrifices, take additional courses, and show initiative, opportunities for advancement exist. They stress that individuals can make their own opportunities. Advancement need not mean a higher position in a company; it can also mean advancing in a present job by learning and expanding the position.

Low Pay--Discrimination or Supply and Demand

Most instructors agree that the pay for office workers is low, but they feel it is low for different reasons. Some feel salaries are low because of discrimination against women while others attribute the situation to supply and demand. One instructor feels that secretaries must be getting the pay they feel they deserve or they would not be in the secretarial field.

One instructor feels the low pay for secretaries is due to society's view that women's work is not valued as highly as men's work. In addition, she feels some women are placed in a position where they cannot make any salary demands. For example, with the large number of people applying for secretarial positions, women who are single parents may feel they cannot make wage demands since they can easily be replaced. Another instructor, who also supports the discrimination theory, said that jobs traditionally held by men, even where supply exceeds demand, still pay good money.

The third instructor thinks that the reason secretaries receive low pay is strictly because of supply and demand. This particular instructor does not see the low pay as discrimination against women.

> When you get to the upper levels, it's reasonable pay, but a beginning secretary is terrible. I don't know how you can survive. The reason it is so bad is that there are more secretaries than there is work. Therefore, businesses can get them cheap. It is all based on economics; it has nothing to do with discrimination. It is like corn in the fall. With a lot of corn it is as cheap

> as borscht. Try to buy in the winter, it is more expensive.

Even though the instructors feel the pay for secretarial work is low, most do not discuss pay with the students. One instructor said she briefly discusses pay with her students but that she does not use figures. She feels the students know what secretaries are paid since they have most likely researched this before entering the program.

Following Orders and Decision-Making

All the instructors feel students should expect to both follow orders and make decisions.

> I think there has to be some kind of blend. It would be unfair to lead them to believe it will be one way or another.

The instructors realize, however, that Office Technology students are not usually strong decision makers. Most instructors noticed a difference between the Office Technology students and the Business Administration students when teaching the same course to both groups. Presented with a problem, Business Administration students would be irritated if given too much help, while Office Technology students would expect to be shown how to solve it. One instructor admits that "spoonfeeding" is a weakness in the Office Technology Program. The students want to be told what to do and sometimes instructors have trouble resisting the urge to tell them answers rather than pushing them to solve a problem on their own. One instructor feels that instructors need to let students search out answers. This instructor feels that if students are led and told to do A, B, and C that when they go to work, they will expect the same. The instructors believe that employers will expect employees to be able to make decisions; they do not want to "stand over" the secretary and say, "This is what I want done now." Although the instructors certainly see a change in the students from September to April, some students in April still ask, "Do you want this, do you want that?" instead of showing initiative and doing work on their own.

Caste System for Instructors

The instructors feel a caste system exists not only for secretaries, but also for those who teach secretaries.

> I think people have overlooked secretaries as far as credit or prestige go. Even with us teaching secretarial; we are only teaching the lowly secretaries. How can we deny that there is a caste system for secretaries when we as teachers find we are at the bottom of the caste system since we teach secretaries...?

One instructor could not be explicit about how she knows there is a caste system at the college but felt strongly that one did exist. Another instructor agrees and thinks this is because Office Technology classes are skill-oriented rather than theoretical courses. The other instructor feels that the Office Technology instructors are not as highly respected as other instructors because they are teaching students to be "just" secretaries. She senses this "caste system" is because society is of the opinion that secretaries are not important.

The instructors in the Office Technology Program realize the stereotypes the Office Technology students face because they too face similar stereotypes.

Summary

Instructors for the Office Technology Program work to create a new vision of a secretary for their students. They try to build student confidence so students can achieve their potential. Even though mixed feelings about whether or not advancement opportunities for secretaries exist, most instructors are convinced of the importance of students believing that they can advance in their jobs if they so choose. Instructors believe that the expectation students have that secretaries only follow orders and do as they are told is unrealistic. Instructors understand the caste system students face since they too face the same caste system because they teach secretaries.

Business Agenda

One set of questions in Chapter One focused on the business agenda. The questions were as follows: "What were employers' and secretaries' perceptions of a secretarial job? Were the instructors' perceptions of a secretarial job in tune with these perceptions? Were students' perceptions in tune with the employers' and secretaries' perceptions?" Issues raised by these questions will be explored in the section that follows.

The students entering the Office Technology Program had the perception that they would become "just secretaries." The instructors, on the other hand, saw secretaries as holding important positions that were vital to the companies for which they worked. Was the instructors' vision correct? Were the students' perceptions before entering the program wrong? Did the instructors believe secretaries played an important role because that is what they wanted to believe? The instructors' goals are to educate students to become secretaries. If the stereotype of a secretary is correct and secretaries only need typing skills, then people could obtain positions as secretaries without completing the Office Technology Program. Did the instructors believe that secretaries held important positions in companies because it justified their own jobs? Because the instructors in the Office Technology Program are preparing students for the business world, it is important to determine whether their approach matches the reality of the business world. Because business helps guide the Office Technology curriculum, employers and secretaries in the business community were interviewed to explore their perceptions of secretarial positions.

Secretaries' Perceptions

The four secretaries interviewed were past graduates of the Office Technology Program. In the selection process, secretaries who worked in the following offices were selected: medical, legal, accounting, and government. The secretaries were women ranging in age from 20 to 50. In addition, eight other secretaries representing medical, legal, accounting, real estate, banking, government, private and public offices wrote essays on their perceptions of secretarial work. Not all of these secretaries were graduates of the Office Technology Program. Some had taken their training from other institutions and others had gained their training through on-the-job experience. The following section focuses on these perceptions.

Core of the Office

All the secretaries interviewed believe that a secretary has a very important position in an office. Secretaries described the position as "the central core of the place of employment," "the heartbeat of the business" and "managers in the middle." A secretary who had been working for three years said:

> My perception of a secretary is that she has more responsibility than I ever imagined. I fully believe that offices wouldn't run without the secretaries. I think they have an extremely important role in an office or an organization.

One secretary said that her definition of a secretary has changed since she started working as one. She once believed that a secretarial position was primarily clerical in nature--performing typing, filing, dictation, minute-taking, and receptionist duties. However, after actually serving as a secretary for the past six years, she now has a different perception: a secretary must possess the skills to perform all clerical functions required plus the ability to act as an ambassador for the organization, be a diplomat between superior and subordinates in the organization, be self-motivated, progressive, organized and yet humble.

Secretaries are important because they provide the first impression many people get of a given company. After all, it is usually a secretary who meets a customer first, either in person or on the telephone. Since the public's impression of the secretary is the first impression they will have of a given company, the way in which the secretary handles customers is extremely important. In addition, the way the secretary does her work reflects on the entire company. If the secretary does not do her job correctly, everyone in the company looks bad. A secretary is at the communication centre of an office; she occupies the place where the work comes together. In order for an office to flow smoothly, secretaries are expected to know all the "in's and out's" of the company and the workings of the office.

Advancement--Depends on You and Your Boss

Some secretaries feel that advancement is up to them.

> If you want to advance, advancement is always available depending on how much effort you are willing to make and if you feel the sacrifices to get there are worth it.

Their definition of advancement includes making one's own opportunities and learning new equipment and software. Most also feel that advancement is dependent on the supervisor too since he or she has the power to advance a secretary. The supervisor's view of the secretarial position and whether or not he or she respects the position is also important.

Many secretaries feel that the qualities required for advancement include being willing to work overtime without pay, doing quality work, being agreeable and personable, and being willing to take additional training. Advancement sometimes means performing the same work for a supervisor in a more prestigious position. This system of advancement does not make sense. A higher position should be based more on what a secretary does and how well it is done rather than on the person for whom the secretary works. One secretary noted, it is not always the best people who are chosen for higher positions in unions. Instead, it may be people with the most seniority, even though they may be marginally qualified. One secretary said that this is great for those people who are just 'riding the rails,' but then there is no reward for doing 'great' work. This system of advancing employees promotes mediocrity in work because employees are not given incentive to become better workers.

Respected by Those Who Understand What Secretaries Do

Some secretaries feel that they must earn respect and that being taken advantage of, most likely results from being accepting rather than being assertive.

> Respect is something I feel you earn as an individual. I, myself, feel I get a great deal of respect from my employer and the people I work with because I respect them. You can only acquire respect by doing your job well, being conscientious, and by being respectful yourself.

Most secretaries think that those who understand the role of the secretary respect them; those who do not understand the role, often do not respect them.

Secretaries feel they are respected if they are left alone to do their jobs without interference and if supervisors ask for their opinions on how projects should be approached. Often it is not what is said or requested, but how it is said or requested that is indicative of the level of respect between supervisors and secretaries. Some secretaries do not feel they are respected when they are expected to "jump" whenever a problem arises. Even though their "time" is not always respected, they are still expected to perform their jobs with a "smile" and always be pleasant. Sometimes they feel that they do not receive respect or that they are under-appreciated when they are not given credit by their supervisors for jobs completed.

Since some secretaries are not allowed to perform tasks without explicit instruction and supervision, they may be seen as incapable or lacking in motivation. Often, secretaries receive comments such as "She is just a secretary" along with the feeling that the general public views them as marginal participants in the business sector. Some secretaries believe this perception comes in part from the media's stereotyping. Examples given were of the nail-filing, big-busted, dumb blonde secretaries depicted on television such as Jennifer from "WKRP in Cincinnati," Mona from "Who's the Boss," and the secretaries in the movie "From Nine to Five." Other examples of the stereotype are the many useless secretaries hired and fired by "Murphy Brown." This stereotype of a "dumb" secretary is also portrayed in comics like "Cathy." One secretary recognized an underlying contradiction in the fact that a secretary is the intelligent, hard-working brains of the organization who is forced to have a "shallow" and "foolish-looking" image as a survival tactic to "stroke the ego" of the boss.

The "media" is not solely to blame for the general lack of respect for secretaries. Jobs traditionally held by women are generally regarded as less important, less difficult, and worthy of less monetary value and less respect. Our culture promotes the image of a woman as a wife/mother/homemaker and a man as the husband/father/breadwinner. This places pressure on both males and females in our society, which is often contrary to the desires and talents of individuals. In the search for equality, women have become a large percentage of the paid workforce, but by no means are the largest recipients of actual dollars paid to "working people."

Many secretaries interviewed feel they are fortunate to have supervisors and co-workers who respect their abilities as secretaries. As well, businesses are changing their secretaries' titles to move away from traditional stereotypes; for example, a newer title is technical assistant. Secretaries would receive more respect if employers would acknowledge that the secretary of today needs professional training.

Pay--Depends on Where You Work

The rate of pay secretaries receive often depends upon the organization and the level of her/his boss. Secretaries who work for large companies, such as oil companies, usually receive the best pay. Secretaries employed in the public service are usually paid at a higher rate than those employed by the private sector. One secretary said, "If a secretary is employed in a place where there is a union, the pay is often acceptable; however, in the private business sector where there are often no unions, secretaries are grossly underpaid."

One secretary, who had a position in a business with a union, said she had seen an employment advertisement for someone knowledgeable in WordPerfect with good computer skills and who was experienced in bookkeeping for $6.00/hour. When she heard these wages she felt fortunate to be earning her current wage. She said that this did not mean she did not want to move up the pay scale but that the advertisement had helped place the economic times into perspective.

Some secretaries in businesses with employees protected by unions feel their wage is 'pretty good.' One said that the pay for women is low because supervisors do not think that secretaries have an important position. Some secretaries attribute the low pay to the fact that secretarial work is a female-dominated position. The thinking seems to be that men are paid better because they have families to support. Still, women can be single parents who are expected to live on a low wage.

An absence of a standard or a benchmark for placing value on the job secretaries perform exists. Value is placed on 'who' the secretary works for rather than on the kind of work that the secretary performs. Secretaries working for top officials in a company make more money than secretaries who work for someone else in the company even though the duties may be similar.

In our culture, the myth that women's work is not as valuable as men's work has been promoted and women perpetuate this myth by accepting low pay. If no one would work for $6 an hour, employers would be forced to pay higher wages. If no one complains, it will not change. Many married women in today's society see their income as the "second" income, so they are willing to accept low pay. This forces women whose job is their only source of income into a situation where they cannot demand more money. Employers can find someone who is willing to take the job for that pay. Women need to work together to change the pay they receive. The fact that secretaries who are union members make more than colleagues performing similar duties in non-union businesses shows the strength of unions and the difference that people working together can make.

It's a Career or It's a Job

Most secretaries feel that being a secretary is a career; some feel it is a job

> Whether you consider secretarial work a career or a job, I believe, is a very individual attitude. I personally consider it my career. When you possess the skills necessary for a good secretary, I believe you are prepared and are more effective doing any job whether you are a personal secretary or in a supervisor or office manager position.

One secretary said that when she entered the field she was a single mother and needed a job. At that time she would have taken any job available. She now sees why an individual would aspire to have a secretarial career since the position has demands, challenges and rewards. She added that, if ten years ago anyone had told her that when she was 30 she would be working as a secretary, she would have laughed and told them they were crazy. At that time she had aspirations for something "BIG" such as a doctor, scientist, designer – an occupation where she could leave a lasting mark. Now she says she is content in a secretarial position even though she does not feel she will be in the profession until retirement. Another secretary sees her job as a career. She wanted to make a higher wage and advance, but because of family commitments, she had decided not to continue her education or work longer hours to earn more money. She feels that a larger pay check does not always mean a happier life.

Even though most secretaries interviewed see their positions as careers, some see them as jobs. One secretary sees her position as a job because, according to her job description, she has no decisions to make. She is just to follow practice and procedures. She feels that, to see the position as a career, she would have to be in a management position where she would have "a say" in matters. Another secretary said that her position was a career before she had children. She used to "eat and sleep it." She said that in her union, because one was paid for overtime they were never allowed to stay after hours, but she would anyway. If she felt that she needed to stay, she would do so on her own time. When she had her first child, her job was no longer her first priority. She feels that, for a job to be considered a career, one needs to be climbing the corporate ladder.

The women who see their positions as jobs had encountered roadblocks from employers. For example, one capable secretary, who had been very successful in the Office Technology Program, worked for a supervisor who did not allow her to make decisions. She was to do as she was told. When people encounter situations where they have no say in matters or where they have no control over their environment, they can react by choosing not to care. The position then can become a means to an end, just a job. One secretary said her supervisor refused to allow her to order the photocopy paper. He wanted to make every decision no matter how minor. In situations such as these, it appears that employers are not allowing their employees to work to their potential. In addition, because these employers want control over all aspects of the office, they themselves are not working to their potential for they are spending time doing work that could be done by someone else. In the long run, this costs the company more money.

It's More Than Just Following Orders

Most secretaries feel their job requires decision-making. Even those who think that secretaries mainly follow orders feel that secretaries have to make decisions on how to perform certain aspects of the job. One example is screening calls. The secretary must decide the urgency of the call and whether or not the boss should be interrupted.

> One of the most challenging aspects of a secretarial job is that secretaries are required to make decisions and follow orders. I think the most difficult decision a secretary is required to make is when to handle a situation themselves, when to make a recommendation to their boss or co-workers or when to back away completely.

Sometimes people who come into contact with a secretary do not know what the secretary's limits are in the way of decision-making. Secretaries can, therefore, be placed in awkward situations by the people they serve. Often secretaries are left alone in an office and are required to decide how to handle situations. If a situation arises, based on their knowledge of procedures and policy, they must decide how to handle the problem.

Secretaries do follow orders; that is part of their job. They are entrusted with a job and are told the rules but there are decisions to be made within the execution of the job.

> Good secretaries do not bother employers with every little decision but good secretaries also ask before deciding things when unsure.

Every position involves some decision-making, but the decisions made depend on the boss and the area in which the secretary is working. Many times bosses will place their trust in secretaries to handle a given job because they do not want to worry about details. Sometimes, however, bosses will want to control everything. Secretaries then have to be very careful not to overstep the boundaries of their position.

Caste System--It Exists

Most secretaries interviewed had encountered people who held a stereotypical image of secretaries as individuals who answer the phone, type, pour coffee and do their nails at the desk. One secretary said the most common reaction to her being a secretary is a facial expression of "I guess you couldn't make the grade to become a professional." The secretaries found reactions such as this very frustrating.

> My own husband and I have had rather animated discussions over the stress levels of our jobs. When I told him that much of my job is taking and dealing with complaints and performing all of the other tasks expected of my position, he could not believe that my job could be stressful because I was a secretary with no real responsibility.

This secretary said that after years of being married and many 'animated' discussions, her husband is beginning to understand her role and she feels his image of a secretary is beginning to change. She found his condescending reaction toward the job of secretary insulting and hurtful.

Another secretary said that when the courier dropped off his packages, he would make comments about how easy her job was and how nice it would be to just sit around all day. She also commented about the time she told her fiancé how exhausted she was from work. He looked at her in surprise and said, "How could you be tired? You just did secretarial work all day." He just could not fathom secretarial work as being mentally exhausting.

Secretaries' places of work and job titles affect how people respond to them. Secretaries receive a more positive response if the company is seen as a good place to work. People's perceptions also seem to change depending on the job title. The title "secretary" has become less prestigious and other titles such as administrative assistant appear to hold more weight. This bothered the secretaries because in reality both titles mean the same thing.

Employers' Perceptions

Interviews with eight employers of secretaries were conducted. Employers representing the following areas of business were selected: accounting, banking, real estate, law, government and private businesses. Employers of both sexes who were from different age groups were chosen. Their perceptions are included in the following section.

Initially, when I asked employers about secretaries, we had a problem with the definition of "secretary." For example, when asked how many secretaries were in the office, one employer replied, "Two." I looked out at the office where ten women were doing office work. He gave eight of the ten women different titles such as Bookkeeping Clerk I. His vision of a secretary was someone who typed and filed. To avoid confusion and misunderstandings in subsequent interviews, I used the term "office worker" or explained that the term "secretary" included all office workers.

A Secretary Has an Important Job

All the employers interviewed felt that secretaries hold important positions. They rely very heavily on their secretaries. One employer said: "Secretarial jobs are not menial jobs anymore."

> A secretary has a very important position. I couldn't function without a secretary. My practice gets very frustrating if I don't have a well-organized, capable secretary.

When asked to describe a secretary, one employer said: "The most important person in my life." She went on to explain that, with her business and with almost every business, the first contact from the outside is made with the secretary. If the wrong impression is left, the wrong thing is said, or the wrong attitude shown, she may never get the chance to talk to that potential client. If she does not get the opportunity to see clients before they are "turned off," that affects her business. She added again that she thought the secretarial position was very important, particularly in a service business such as hers. If people did not get good service, they would seek it elsewhere. Another employer said that secretaries are the company's first customer contact. The customer forms an impression of how the company operates through the secretary. Employers also said that secretaries are important because they enable bosses to do their jobs better, faster and more efficiently. A good secretary can adjust a supervisor to operate at full potential, which saves the company money.

The Changing Role of a Secretary--An Administrative Position

All employers were of the opinion that the secretary's role has changed: A secretary is "more than just a girl that does typing and handles incoming and outgoing mail," secretaries "do not just do typing and filing any more." They are taking on more administrative duties and the position is becoming more of an administrative position.

> I'd define a secretary as someone in a support capacity doing a combination of administrative and clerical duties.

Because secretaries are taking on more business tasks, employers feel that they need training in both secretarial and business skills. Some feel secretaries need training similar to someone starting up a business. For example, someone entering the workforce in an accounting office would need bookkeeping courses while someone moving into a position in a law office would need legal procedures courses. Employers also said that secretaries must have an understanding of the overall business, the nature of the business, and the employers' concerns.

The work flow in today's office environment has changed. E-mail, computers, and technology have all made a difference. There is less demand for routine, mundane tasks and more need for management skills.

> The secretarial position changes continuously . . . the secretarial position requires the ability to adapt and use management skills with each situation.

The role of managers has also changed. Managers are now willing to e-mail each other and make their own coffee. Not too long ago, management had an aura of being above everyone else; now front-line people are receiving more respect.

Some employers feel secretaries could do more thinking. For example, bosses could make all their own arrangements for conventions, or they could say to their secretaries, "You take care of it." There is still a mind set that there is a limit to what secretaries are capable of doing; however, some employers would like to see secretaries take more initiative and make more decisions on their own. Some are looking for secretaries who actually act like office managers. The more secretaries are willing to manage, the more responsibility employers will give them. Employers also want someone who can work independently. For example, an employer wants to be able to say, "This issue needs to be resolved, you look after it." They see secretaries of the future needing more managerial and organizational skills and fewer technical skills.

Some employers do not have the time to learn how to use many computer programs. Because employers do not have the time, they need to rely on someone else. These employers want secretaries who have the initiative and educational background to enhance their own jobs by exploring how equipment and programs can be used more efficiently.

Advancement – Little Upward Mobility

Whether a secretary could advance in the hierarchy of a company at all depended upon the company. In a small office, advancement is usually seen as limited.

> I think to most, advancement is limited. But I started out as a receptionist/secretary and I ended up being manager. So I found it is not limited because I learned so much by reading and typing and knowing what is going on.

In some larger companies where there were opportunities for advancement, a secretary who was an employee would have first chance at a higher level position. Many times, even if the hierarchy of the company allowed few opportunities for advancement, there were opportunities for job enrichment and salary increases. Some companies had profit-sharing plans where secretaries who could help the company work more efficiently would make more money.

A concern that secretaries were held back if they were good existed.

> It is a dead-end position. Very simple . . . if you get someone who is really effective in that job, you want to keep them [sic] there.

Pay--Low in Private Sector

Most employers feel that, in general, secretaries are underpaid and their salaries are generally determined by where they work. Some employers feel secretaries are underpaid because secretarial work is commonly perceived to be a menial job.

> Secretaries are underpaid for present day expectations but they are paid well for what the old-day expectations used to be.

Because a stereotypical secretarial job is not seen as a positive for warranting greater pay, some employers were not willing to pay secretaries more. Some employers, however, said that having a poor secretary makes one realize what an important role a secretary fills and that secretarial work, well done, is deserving of more pay. Employers realize that, in the absence of secretaries, it is not easy for them to do their jobs. In addition many times, if bosses are not present, secretaries are required to act in their absence. For example, in an emergency, secretaries need to act on information in place of the boss. They then need to inform the boss when she/he returns.

Some employers in private industry said they would like to pay their office staff more. However, business has become very competitive and secretaries' salaries are part of the overhead. Some employers look at the bottom line. For work they cannot compensate financially, employers try to reward in other ways, such as time off.

Other employers feel that the reason secretaries are underpaid is because there seems to be so many qualified people who can fill a secretarial position. "Why would you hire a person for $15 an hour when you can advertise at $8 an hour and 30 people apply for the job?"

Summary

The secretaries feel they play a vital role in the office. They see a secretarial position as the core of the office with advancement opportunities, a career that is more than just following orders. They also feel they are respected by those who understand what they do. The employers feel secretaries hold important positions that are evolving toward more administrative positions. They want secretaries who are more like office managers people who can work independently and handle details for the supervisors.

The Tension of Agendas

The instructors in the Office Technology Program are in tune with the business world's view of a secretary. The instructors hope to build student confidence so students can "stand up" against the traditional stereotype. Instructors want to help students develop a perception of a secretary as someone who holds an important job, who can advance, and who must be able to make some decisions. The students' perception on entering the program contrasts with that of the instructors and employers. They have a stereotypical image of a secretary which includes no room for advancement, low respect because it is an easy job instead of a career, low pay because the job is not demanding, and a job where following orders is more important than showing initiative. As is revealed in this chapter, the students have one agenda and the instructors another. As these two agendas comes into conflict in the classroom, there is tension.

CHAPTER FIVE

CURRICULUM OF TENSIONS

Introduction

Description of the student, instructor and business agendas (Chapter 4) gave voice to participants' perceptions of secretarial work. Questions from Chapter One that provide a focus for this chapter are as follows: "What messages were sent to the students via the curriculum-as-planned? What information fell into the null curriculum and was therefore omitted from the program? Through the curriculum-as-lived, what did the instructors want the students to learn? How did the curriculum-as-planned differ from the curriculum-as-lived? What had the students learned about a secretarial job through the curriculum-as-lived?" In this chapter, the themes that surfaced through the research will be discussed and interpreted to provide an understanding of the functional curriculum in an Office Technology Program.

Curriculum-as-Planned Versus Curriculum-as-Lived

In Alberta the Career and Technology Studies Program incorporates high school level business education classes. The Career and Technology Studies Program is organized as a series of individualized, self-paced competency-based modules. At the college where this study was conducted, rumours that the Office Technology Program will be altered to the competency-based education model used in the high schools exist. College administrators appear to be of the opinion that office technology and modularization based on competencies would make a natural fit.

Historically, modularization has been used by institutions for secretarial programs although it has not been seen as appropriate for academic programs (Jackson, 1991). Research shows that a competency-based approach shifts curriculum to "narrow, short-term, instrumental educational objectives" (Jackson, 1991, p. 357). Secretarial training is targeted since it is seen as having measurable skills that are easy to evaluate. John Dewey, a critic of the competency approach, argued that narrow occupational instruction would "develop a machinelike skill in routine lines...but it will be at the expense of those qualities of alert observation and coherent and ingenious planning which make an occupation intellectually rewarding" (1966, p. 310).

> In an autocratically managed society, it is often a conscious object to prevent the development of

> freedom and responsibility; a few do the planning and ordering, the others follow directions and are deliberately confined to narrow and prescribed channels of endeavor. However much such a scheme may inure to the prestige and profit of a class, it is evident that it limits the development of the subject class; hardens and confines the opportunities for learning through experience of the master class, and in both ways hampers the life of the society as a whole. (Dewey, 1966, p. 310)

Critics of the competency-based approach claim that the emphasis on behavioral objectives emphasizes learning of "routine, unimportant, even trivial material" (Jackson, 1991, p. 358) and blocks "the development of elaborated knowledge or the formation of a coherent political consciousness" (Jackson, 1991, p. 358). As a result, competency-based education "reduces the potential in education for the collectivization of workers' knowledge and the political power which it brings, and increases the potential of the use of working knowledge to assert the interests of capital over those of workers" (Jackson, 1991, p. 358).

Office Technology curriculum is targeted for competency-based education since Office Technology students are seen as learning only technical skills. Even though technical skills are an important part of an Office Technology curriculum, this study reveals that students are acquiring much more than technical skills through the functional curriculum.

In the past, most research in office technology has been quantitative; task analysis is used to determine the competencies required by secretaries and then curriculum is built based on these competencies. The qualitative research method used in the present study reveals a parallel curriculum operating in the Office Technology classrooms. This parallel curriculum is recognized but 'not' recognized. It exists and is recognized by the participants but is not visible in the written documentation. The curriculum-as-planned (i.e., what the written documentation says will happen in the classroom) is different from the curriculum-as-lived (what actually happens in the classroom).

Even though the curriculum-as-planned supports technical skills, a move to individualized, self-paced, competency-based modules that evaluate only technical skills will take office technology back in time since more is actually happening through the functional curriculum than the written documentation reveals.

The curriculum-as-planned reflects a curriculum that is becoming outdated. Through the curriculum-as-lived, instructors work to supplement the curriculum so it is more current with today's business world. However, since the curriculum-as-planned and the curriculum-as-lived are sending the students conflicting messages, the goals of the instructors are not always achieved.

Philosophy Behind Office Technology Curriculum

Office Technology curriculum follows the 'technical curriculum model' where curriculum is based on the business world as it is seen to exist. Jobs are analyzed and divided into specific tasks. These specific tasks are further analyzed and performance objectives for these tasks are written. A flaw in the technical curriculum model is that a 'whole' is more than the 'sum of its parts.' For example, learning what it means to be a secretary involves more than only learning the individual tasks a secretary performs. Breaking a secretarial job down into specific tasks does not capture the 'essence' of what it means to be a secretary.

The technical curriculum model "begins with an acceptance of contemporary social values" (Macdonald, 1975) and maintains the status quo. This model does not question what to teach -- it assumes the skills required by the business world are the skills that should be incorporated into the curriculum. When it employs this model, curriculum reflects the present system rather than an improved system. For example, employers interviewed in this research said they wanted their secretaries to take more initiative and to work more independently. Analyzing the skills their secretaries presently possessed would not, therefore, have demonstrated the skill level the employers actually required.

Another difficulty is that the business world sends conflicting messages regarding the requirements for secretarial positions. Previous management philosophies are clashing with current management philosophies. For example, employers may say that they want their employees to be like office managers while continuing to advertise for someone who possesses qualities such as speed and accuracy on straight-copy timed writings. Knowingly or unknowingly, people in the business world are still affected by the principles of Taylorism.

Taylor's Scientific Management Principles (Taylorism)

Today, almost a hundred years after Taylorism began, its principles still underscore our society's thinking. Because Office Technology curriculum mirrors the expectations of the business world, it is therefore also affected by Taylorism. The following information on Taylorism is taken from Braverman's (1974) book, Labor and Monopoly Capital.

Frederick Winslow Taylor initiated the scientific management movement in the late nineteenth century in order to control workers. From his experiences as a gang boss in a machine shop, Taylor recognized that workers in the shop possessed more knowledge than the supervisors and therefore could control the amount of output.

> ...these foremen and superintendents know, better than any one else, that their own knowledge and

> personal skills fall short of the combined knowledge and dexterity of the workmen under them. (Taylor as quoted by Braverman, 1974, p. 101)

Because the combined knowledge of the workers exceeded the knowledge of the supervisor, the workers could determine the amount of work that they were able to accomplish in a day. In order to control workers, Taylor divided 'thinking' from 'work.' Managers controlled the thinking, while the work was routinized and simplified. In the "old" system, workers were responsible for planning and implementing the work. In the "new" system, management used scientific principles to study the workers' tasks, plan the work, and give workers the specific tasks, complete with instructions on how to accomplish them and the exact time it would take.

> All possible brain work should be removed from the shop and centered in the planning or laying-out department. (Taylor as quoted by Braverman, 1974, p. 113)

By separating conception from execution, Taylor dehumanized work so it was reduced to a level of animal-like form. The purpose of this undertaking was not to enhance the ability of the worker but to cheapen the worker by decreasing training and enlarging output (Braverman, 1974, p. 118).

Application of Taylorism to the Office

Before the late nineteenth century, clerical workers were the "managerial counterpart of the skilled craftsman" (Simon, 1991, p. 51), since their work involved all aspects of the office. Master craftsmen such as the top clerk maintained control over all areas of office work. Young clerks learned their craft in office apprenticeships and then advanced through the levels by promotions.

In the last part of the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century, there was rapid growth in offices and employers felt a need to systemize and control work. Where employers once had clerks who were their loyal assistants, in modern corporations, clerical work was now performed in separate departments. Office managers borrowed ideas of Taylorism from the factory and began to rationalize clerical work.

Leffingwell, building on Taylor's principles, used time-and-motion studies to reveal the wasted time and effort present in office work (Simon, et al, 1991, p. 51). In order to gain more efficiency, employers equipped typewriters with mechanical devices to count keystrokes. There was a concerted effort to make clerks accountable for the entire working day.

> Time and motion study reveals just as startling results in the ordinary details of clerical work as they do in the factory. And after all, since every motion of the hand or body, every thought, no matter how simple, involves the consumption of physical

> energy, why should not the study and analysis of these motions result in the discovery of a mass of useful effort in clerical work just as it does in the factory. (Leffingwell as quoted by Braverman, 1974, p. 307).

Office managers worked to standardize and routinize all forms of clerical work. Clerical work was analyzed and divided among workers. By parceling out work in this fashion, workers lost all comprehension of the complete process and of cause and effect.

Management interfered with all aspects of office work. For example, office layout was scrutinized; pneumatic tubes for communication between desks and offices and conveyor belts for the movement of work became the fashion. Offices were designed so that items were within easy reach of the clerk's desk. Leffingwell observed that, if clerks had to walk a hundred feet to get a drink of water from a water fountain, this wasted valuable time for the employers. The need for workers to take a break for mental freshness was not taken into consideration (Braverman, 1974).

Office work, like work in factories, became 'manual labor.' Even though employers recognized that polarization of the office was de-skilling the workers, they rationalized their decisions as appropriate since their employees were mainly women. For example: "The majority of white-collar tasks are less interesting, less prestigious, and bring lower remuneration, but they are carried out by women with reduced aspirations...." (Crozier as quoted by Braverman, 1974, p. 130)

Following on the heels of these time-and-motion studies, standards for the office were developed. The following example is taken from the manual A Guide to Office Clerical Time Standards: A Compilation of Standard Data Used by Large American Companies: (Braverman, 1974, p. 321)

Open and close	Minutes
File drawer, open and close, no selection	.04
Folder, open or close flaps	.04
Desk drawer, open side drawer of standard desk	.014
Open center drawer	.026
Close side	.015
Close center	.027

Even though Taylorism stresses output, it does not taken into consideration that worker dissatisfaction actually decreased output. Under this system absenteeism increased, since workers were bored and unhappy in their jobs (Braverman, 1974).

Strict application of the principles of Taylorism meant that workers were treated like machines that had no knowledge of the overall operations of the company. So long as work was routine, the office seemed to function; however, when the routine was disrupted, office workers could not react quickly to resolve problems.

New Management Principles -- Democratization of the Workplace

Societal and economic trends have led to a shift in philosophies in the workplace. Globalization of the economy, intensified competition for new markets, rapid advances in technology and the pressure to create new products in less time have forced companies to redefine operations and dismantle infrastructures that have been in existence since the Industrial Revolution (Flores, 1992, p. 54). With the changing demands of today's society, businesses must compete by using democratic processes. Syme (1994) says that since change is the only constant in today's competitive business environment, the only way organizations can compete is to be flexible, responsive and empowering. Organizations now recognize 'workers' as a valuable commodity. What workers can bring to the workplace in terms of background, training, expertise, and creativity is considered vital in helping companies achieve their goals.

In the days of Taylorism, Henry Ford was a hero for his development of the assembly line; today the Ford Motor Company (Flores, 1992, p. 55) has adopted the slogan "No More Heroes." Instead of one individual at the top of the corporation who single-handedly saves the company, corporations now look to solid management teams. Apple Computer executive John Sculley

(Kanter, 1990) says he has witnessed the dethroning of heroes in his corporation; now the heroes are teams of employees.

In the past, managers generated the ideas and workers carried out their instructions. Now workers are expected to be the "wellspring from which inspiration and invention flow" (Flores, 1992, p. 59). Ron Compton, President and CEO of Aetna Life, says that businesses can no longer treat workers as they did in 1910 with the 'shut up and do your job' philosophy. He feels that today's managers must change to an attitude where workers are respected (as cited by Syme, 1994). The new philosophy is that the more knowledge workers have, the more likely it is that they will make intelligent decisions which will enhance the success of the product. Tom Melohn, CEO of North American Tool and Die, increased productivity by 480% by following principles which included treating your workers with respect and acknowledging that the person doing the job knows it better than anyone else. (Melohn, 1994)

Management is shifting towards democracy in the workplace. The concepts such as democracy include a set of beliefs that govern behavior. They are:

- "Full and free *communication*, regardless of rank and power.
- Reliance on *consensus* rather than coercion or compromise to manage conflict.

- The idea that *influence* is based on technical competence and knowledge rather than on the vagaries of personal whims or prerogatives of power.
- An atmosphere that permits and even encourages emotional *expression* as well as task-oriented behavior.
- A basically *human bias*, one that accepts the inevitability of conflict between the organization and the individual but is willing to cope with and mediate this conflict on rational grounds" (Slater, 1990, p. 167).

Carnevale (1990) describes two ways to increase productivity: working harder and working smarter. Carnevale says "analysis of data as far back as 1929 demonstrates that 'working smarter' – the ability of working teams to learn together – is the most significant among human factors in producing of income and productivity growth" (pp. 32-33). Philosophies based on Taylorism promoted working harder; today's philosophies based on democracy in the workplace promote working smarter.

However, business still sends conflicting messages as to the qualities it wants in a secretary. Office management principles from the turn of the century continue to interfere with the office management principles of today On the one hand, employers acknowledge that secretaries need more managerial skills but, on the other hand, they still advertise for people who can straight-copy type accurately and efficiently. Paralleling these conflicting messages is the disjunction between the curriculum-as-planned and the curriculum-as-lived.

Curriculum-as-Planned

Education and vocational training have also been influenced by Taylorism. In the United States, with the onset of World War I, a need to train thousands of workers to support the war effort materialized. Vocational educators, who were hired by the U.S. War Department to design training schemes, brought with them influences of Taylorism (Jackson, 1987, p. 356). This war-time effort had a great impact on the wider educational community. Many of these influences from Taylorism are still affecting education today especially in the curriculum-as-planned for Office Technology programs. This is the case in the college program that is the subject of this study. However, the college is situated in a small city, in a rural area, where most graduates of the Office Technology Program will be working in 1-2 person offices and be expected to act more like office managers than machines.

A Curriculum Reflecting Taylorism

Intentionally or not, the curriculum-as-planned for the Office Technology curriculum mirrors principles of Taylorism in the curriculum language, hierarchical structure of courses, separation of Office Technology students from Business Administration students, separation of Office Technology and

Business Administration instructors, the way students are expected to work in isolation, and the emphasis on technical skills that stress output, standardization and reproduction.

Curriculum Language

The Office Technology Program, along with the Business Administration Program, is a part of the Business Department. There is considerable overlap between the two programs with students from both programs taking the same Accounting, Business English, Oral Communications, and Microcomputer courses. Three additional Office Technology courses, Business Law, Introduction to Business and Office Management, are modified Business Administration courses. Following principles of Taylorism where conception of work is separated from execution of work and where management is responsible for the 'thinking' and workers for the 'doing,' the curriculum language for the Business Administration certificate courses contains key words such as management, theoretical, controlling, planning, organizing, directing, and understanding. On the other hand, the curriculum language for the Office Technology certificate courses stresses notions such as efficiency, accuracy, speed, skills, and effectiveness. Following Taylorism, the explicit curriculum for the Office Technology program emphasizes technical skills that are measurable by physical output.

Hierarchical Structure

Reflecting principles of Taylorism where management is seen as being higher and more important than the front-line workers, Business Administration courses are given higher course numbers than Office Technology courses. The Business Administration courses are given the higher 100 numbers, whereas Office Technology courses are given the lower 100 numbers. For example, Business Management, a Business Administration class, has the number 161; whereas Beginning Typewriting, an Office Technology course, has the number 101. In addition, until recently, instructors teaching Office Technology classes had to teach more hours per week than the Business Administration instructors, even though they were in the same department and sometimes taught the same classes.

Separation of Office Technology from Business Administration Students

The separation of management from workers in Taylorism is reflected in the separation of Office Technology students from Business Administration students, even though four classes overlap between the two programs (i.e. Accounting, Business English, Oral Communications, and Microcomputers). Some Office Technology students were surprised to discover that they attended the same classes as Business Administration students. Office

Technology students attended most of their classes in the S-Wing in the typewriting rooms, while Business Administration students attended most of their classes at the opposite end of campus in the T-Wing.

In the past, Office Technology students had encountered people whose reaction to their career aspiration was that they must not be smart enough to do anything else. Being physically separated from the other students in the Business Department supports the message that Office Technology students were different. If Office Technology students were in class with Business Administration students they could see for themselves whether or not they could compete with Business Administration students. In addition, Business Administration students would have a chance to better understand Office Technology students.

The actual reason for separating Office Technology and Business Administration students was scheduling: Office Technology students are in a quota program. The separation was not a conscious effort to isolate, but rather a failure to recognize the advantages of integration.

Secretarial Work is Women's Work

Whereas Business Administration has a mixture of men and women in the program, all students in Office Technology are women. This situation perpetuates the concept that only women can be secretaries. Because the two programs are separated, Office Technology students do not have the opportunity to realize that the skills they are acquiring are also needed by Business Administration students. A mixture of male and female students from the two programs would create a climate where they could learn from each other.

Separation of Office Technology Instructors From Business Administration Instructors

Not only are Office Technology students separated from Business Administration students but Office Technology instructors are separated from Business Administration instructors, even though they are all in the same department. Once again, this is not the result of a conscious plan but the result of the failure to recognize the importance of integration. As a consequence, conflicting lines are drawn between the two programs. The Office Technology instructors say they feel a caste system in the department where they are at the bottom.

Working in Isolation

Instead of having students learning how to work together to achieve the best end product, most textbooks and curriculum following concepts of Taylorism, support students working in isolation. There is the expectation that students will do individual assignments and write individual examinations. For example, the college calendar states that final examinations must be 30% of the course mark. This concept works in opposition to team work and projects. If instructors want to substitute a team project for the individualized final examination, they must obtain approval from their dean. Therefore, basing the semesters' work on team projects means going against the culture of the institution.

Technical Skills

Following concepts of Taylorism, students are valued for their productivity in terms of physical output. An analysis of the course outlines for Office Technology classes reveals that Office Technology classes stress goals based on physical output. For example, "the student will touch type at a minimum of 30 wpm with a maximum of three errors per five minute timed writing." In addition, all the displays in the classrooms where the students spend most of their classes promoted speed and accuracy in typewriting. One typing room has the display: "Type Letter By Letter and With Rhythm" that promotes the Cortez Peters Method of typewriting accurately. On the front wall are a picture and write-up about Cortez Peters who could type at 220 words per minute. Students who type with zero or one error on a 5-minute straight-copy timed writing receive a certificate. Such certificates are placed all over the north wall. These displays emphasize the importance of doing well on straight-copy timed writings.

Not only do the curriculum and displays stress the need to achieve measurable technical skills but almost all of the marks for the courses are given for technical skills attainment. In the graduation requirements in the college calendar, students are warned that they must have 45 words per minute with 90 percent accuracy to graduate. In addition, even though students are allowed one "D or D+" in the program, that mark cannot be in Typewriting. In contrast, there is no emphasis on people skills in the graduation requirements. If students have little or no 'people skills' they can graduate. Even though most courses emphasize technical skills, the principles of Taylorism are most evident in the Typewriting courses where students are evaluated for their physical output in terms of speed and accuracy.

Typewriting

Even though employers advertise the use of words per minute on timed writings to screen applicants for office positions, does the ability to do straight-copy typewriting really reflect the qualities an employer would like in an employee? Do employers want someone who can straight-copy type accurately or someone who can compose a letter and format the letter ready for a signature? Even though typewriting skills are important in producing work, instructors say a high correlation does not exist between someone who can straight-copy type at high speeds and someone who can compose and format a letter in final form quickly. For example, a student who can type 45 wpm may be able to produce a letter faster than someone who can type 80 wpm.

Because employers use timed writing as a basis for hiring, timed writings are extremely important in the program. The Office Technology area has two part-time aides whose main responsibility is to administer timed writings. Students spend time in the secretarial learning center taking timed writing after timed writing trying to achieve the required goals.

Following the principles of Taylorism, what is highly valued in Typewriting classes is output (speed and accuracy) standardization, and reproduction.

Output (Speed). All the typewriting course outlines stress speed and accuracy on straight-copy timed writings. In order to pass Beginning Typewriting (Busi. 101) students must achieve 25 words per minute. Intermediate Typewriting (Busi. 102) requires a typewriting speed of 30 words per minute, and Typewriting Speed and Accuracy Building (Busi. 103) requires students to achieve a minimum of 45 words per minute. In Busi. 103, the straight-copy timed writing section is worth 50 percent of the class. In Machine

Transcription (Busi. 133), all transcriptions tests are production tests with marks based two-thirds on accuracy and one-third on speed.

Output (Accuracy). In addition to attaining speed, students must maintain a high accuracy rate for timed writings in typewriting to be acceptable. In Beginning Typewriting and Intermediate Typewriting, students are allowed a maximum of three errors per timed writing. In Typewriting Speed and Accuracy, students must have a minimum of 90 percent accuracy on timed writings. The accuracy rate is calculated by taking the total words per minute, subtracting the errors and dividing by the total words per minute. Students are encouraged to increase their speed while maintaining high accuracy. This contradiction caused tension and frustration for the students.

In Busi. 101, 102 and 103, students who type 3-minute or 5-minute timed writing with zero or one error, receive certificates that are placed on the wall. Students who are then able to do a 3-minute or 5-minute timed writing at a faster speed with zero or one error, receive a star on their certificate. Through the implicit curriculum, instructors add a human element by presenting a chocolate "kiss" each time a student types a timed writing with zero or one error.

Standardization. Documents are to be formatted following certain standards. Ten percent is deducted for each variation from the standard.

Students and instructors run into conflicts between the texts for the Typewriting classes and the text for the Microcomputer class. The Typewriting texts adhere strictly to proper formatting, whereas the examples in the computer texts demonstrate what typing instructors call "sloppy formatting." One instructor made the comment, "You can tell this text was written by a computer person with fewer formatting skills." The instructors have to override the textbook's instructions and ask students to use the proper formatting that they have learned in their other Office Technology classes.

With the movement from typewriters to computers, formatting needs to be re-examined. For example, the wizards (templates) that come installed on some computer packages are preset with formats that conflict with typewriting formats. The microcomputing manuals and software packages reflect a modern world approach whereas the typewriting manuals reflect a more formal, historical past.

Reproduction. Most word processing assignments involve reproducing assignments from a textbook. For example, in senior word processing, the textbook assignments ask students to reproduce a newsletter from their textbook rather than something original. Secretaries will need to create newsletters in an office setting rather than just simply copying the material. However, in this case, the textbook assumes the students must first learn by example from an existing newsletter before they can create one of their own. Nevertheless, the time constraints for the class do not allow for both, so the students do not progress beyond reproducing a given text.

Conclusions

In the past, the business world has required output, speed, accuracy, standardization, and reproduction from its secretaries. However, business now recognizes its need for workers who can communicate, think and learn; and workers who are responsible and adaptable team players (Conference Board of Canada, 1996). As times change, curriculum must be re-evaluated to reflect these needs. The curriculum-as-planned recognizes technical skills. However, the curriculum-as-planned does not recognize the other skills the students acquire through the curriculum-as-lived.

Curriculum-as-Lived

The business world recognizes the failure of Taylorism to produce a more efficient office. As the business world moves away from a belief in mechanistic principles so must Office Technology curriculum.

The curriculum-as-planned acknowledges that students are learning technical skills; however, technical skills are just the "tip of the iceberg." Through the use of qualitative research, a parallel curriculum of equal importance can be seen to operate in the curriculum-as-lived. It is through this parallel curriculum that the curriculum is improved.

Enhancing the Curriculum

The explicit curriculum or curriculum-as-planned needs to be challenged. Does it reflect thinking that is over 100 years old? The business world now acknowledges that, in order to compete in a global economy, workers need to understand their work. For advancements to be made, workers need to combine their knowledge with their work (Carnevale, 1992).

A new model could take into consideration what the students learn from the parallel curriculum that operates in the curriculum-as-lived. It is through this parallel curriculum that the instructors work to enhance the curriculum so it is humanized and current with the requirements of the business world. This parallel curriculum is spoken but 'not' spoken, recognized but 'not' recognized, valued but 'not' valued.

Spoken But 'Not' Spoken

Words are spoken in the classroom but are 'not' spoken in the written documentation. It is through the instructors' words that students' perceptions are challenged and new perceptions are born. The transformation that takes place in the students as they listen and reflect on the instructors' words is not acknowledged in the curriculum-as-planned.

As shown in Chapter 4, the students entering the Office Technology Program view a secretarial position as an inferior one with little opportunity for advancement, respect, or adequate pay. In contrast, as shown in Chapter 4, most instructors view a secretarial job as an important position that can provide "a foot in the door" for other opportunities. Instructors respect secretaries and feel most employers do as well; however, they feel that this respect does not translate into dollars since the pay for secretaries is low. Instructors feel that employers expect secretaries to both follow orders and to make decisions. They hope that their students will see a secretarial position as a career. They say they cannot deny the existence of a caste system for secretaries. In fact, the instructors report that this is obvious in their own work: they feel that they too are at the bottom of a caste system, since they "only teach secretaries."

The instructors recognize that students enter the program with low self-esteem and that student confidence must be built if the students are to survive in office positions. Instructors realize that if students' belief in the traditional stereotype of a secretary goes unchallenged, they will not be prepared for the reality of the workplace.

> We need to help our students gain confidence so they do not go out there like "little mice" and let people walk all over them.

Words Spoken by Instructors

In an effort to build confidence, instructors react to the students' agenda by challenging students' perceptions. This creates a tension as students struggle to find new identities and a new understanding of the workplace.

"You Are Not Just a Secretary". Students enter the Office Technology Program believing that they will be "just a secretary." Through comments in class, instructors try to instill in students the notion that being a secretary is a worthwhile occupation. For example, in one instance a student told an instructor that she was going to become "just a secretary." The instructor became upset and said in a strong voice, "You are not becoming *just* a secretary; being a secretary is nothing to be ashamed of." There were other times, when instructors would "cringe" when they heard students say *just* a secretary. One instructor said, "Until you respect yourself and your profession, no one will respect you. Do not think of yourself as *just* a secretary." Another instructor said that being a secretary is not *just a job*; it is a position.

> You should not feel that you are at the low end of the totem pole because being a secretary is an important job.

This instructor said that secretaries must know how to run an office efficiently.

Students learn from the instructors that people who do not work in offices, do not fully understand the role and importance of secretaries. They are told that the term "office worker" helps make the job sound more professional; it helps to change the 'old way of thinking.' Students also learn that owners and managers are delegating more responsibility to their secretaries. As a result, the image of secretaries is changing for the better; secretaries are beginning to receive more respect.

Students feel the instructors are very supportive and understand what it takes to be a secretary. They say all the instructors encouraged them to strive to their full potential. One student said:

> The instructors in the office technology program are very positive about the secretarial position. One instructor expressed the role of secretaries as the hub of a wheel. Everything in the running of the business passes by the secretary's desk in one form or another. I look forward to the day I can fulfill this position.

As students internalized instructors' comments, their original perceptions were called into question. Students felt they must have acquired this stereotypical image of a secretary from the way secretaries are portrayed on television and in the movies. More than a few students mentioned that they had been influenced by Jennifer Marlow, the secretary from "WKRP in Cincinnati." Other students said they had acquired this belief from conversations with others.

Even though students accept the instructors' words about secretaries, at times they journey back to their original beliefs. For example, even though students say they now believe that a secretary holds a responsible job, some students are still not sure if they will be proud to be a secretary. The students who are not sure say they are not convinced that being a secretary really is an accomplishment. They feel they would like to be proud to be a secretary but with the attitudes of today's society that it will be difficult. One student commented:

> Even though I now see a secretary as a hardworking, stressed-out person who runs the office and that without secretaries in offices there would be chaos and confusion, I feel that most people don't see a secretary as doing an important and hardworking job. Most people just think that secretaries sit on their butts behind a desk all day and do nothing.

Some students are not sure if the general public's perception of a secretary will ever change. They hope it will. Students could not understand why people see a secretary as a "dumb blonde who just files her nails and chews gum." Students are concerned that people have this perception, even though they admit it once had been their own.

By the end of the Office Technology Program, most students see a secretarial position in a new light. They describe secretaries as "the glue," "the nucleus" and the "heartbeat of the office." Without the instructors to challenge the students, their original perceptions would not be called into question. Through interactions with the instructors, students gained a new understanding of what it means to be a secretary.

"It's Not a Mickey Mouse Program." In the past, some students equated high pay with challenging, demanding work and low pay with easy jobs. Secretarial work is not high paying so it was assumed to be an easy job. Since students believed a secretarial job would be easy, they came into the Office Technology Program expecting it to be a "Mickey Mouse" program. However, instructors made it clear that such was not the case. As the students progress through the program, they realize that the program demands a great deal from them in a short space of time.

At first, students struggle with the workload since the program is more difficult than they have anticipated. However, as they work through the program, they come to believe that what they are learning is current and relevant to the workplace. In addition, even though the instructors push the students hard, they are also willing to spend extra time with students if they are having problems. One student said:

> These past six months have changed my view of the secretary forever. There are many different things you must know and learn. This program takes commitment; you cannot slack off. It's a tough program which requires a lot of work.

Students said that they did not realize that the Office Technology Program would be this difficult. One student, who thought her perception was similar to everyone else's in the program, felt the workload was heavy but manageable. She was just surprised because it was not what she expected.

Even though students say that they are proud that the program is difficult and that their grades have to be earned, most recommend that the program be a year and a half or two years long. This creates another tension, since one of the reasons the students take Office Technology is because the program is only a year long.

"Secretaries Deserve Respect." Students feel the instructors respect secretaries by the way that they talk about their own experiences.

> Instructors know what it is like to be a secretary so they treat secretaries the same way they would like to be treated.

Students learn from the instructors that secretaries deserve respect and that the way secretaries receive this respect is by respecting themselves and others. For example, students are told that if you feel good about what you do, others will too. Most students now feel that secretaries can earn respect from bosses, fellow workers, and customers. A student said:

> After being in the work force as a secretary, I have worked with people that thought I was just there to serve them. But I now feel that secretaries can receive respect by showing respect to others, and hoping that they will get treated the same way.

Instructors tell students that organizations such as Professional Secretaries International (PSI) work to help change the image of a secretary so they will receive the respect they deserve. The instructors support PSI and encourage the students to join the membership.

Students say that after being in the program they have more confidence so they do not care as much what others might think. Many students still do not receive support from their friends and family, but they believe that what they are doing is worthwhile. Some students have encountered people who react favorably when students say they are taking "Office Technology" but once the student explains the program, the typical reaction is "Oh, it is just secretarial." Because most students now believe in themselves they are not as troubled by what others say.

"It's Not a Dead-end Job." There is disagreement among the instructors as to whether a secretarial job is a dead-end job. One instructor believes secretaries are in a ghetto with no way out; the other instructors believe that there are opportunities for advancement; it all depends upon the individual. Most of the instructors had once been secretaries and believe it can be a starting point for a different career. They say they try to instill in the students the philosophy that people can be anything they want to be.

Students learn from the instructors that technology, delegation of responsibilities, and the opportunity to specialize in specific areas have opened opportunities for advancement. Students have also learned that, to advance, a person has to want to learn and be able to accept change. A student said:

> I realize now that there is room for advancement. You must be self-motivated, committed, and willing to learn new things to move up the corporate structure.

Many students feel that the program has given them the confidence to know that they can advance in life if they so choose. A student said:

> Now, I feel that a secretary can advance to any level that she wants. With the initial certificate that a secretary has acquired, she can branch out into higher positions, or even return to school to receive a higher degree.

The students note that instructors also stress the necessity for computer knowledge along with a good attitude. Students learn from the instructors that they can specialize by returning to college and taking courses such as Medical Terminology. Students feel that a secretarial job can be used as a 'stepping stone' to other professions. For example:

> I believe that after a person gets an entry-level position there is always room to grow and learn with the company with which you are working. For example, you may start out as a clerk/typist and be promoted to receptionist.

Students feel that there must be opportunities for advancement or they would not be taking a class in Office Management. For example:

> We would not be taking an office management class, if they (the instructors) expected us to be receptionists forever.

Before beginning the program, students believed a secretarial position was a "dead-end" job. Now, after being influenced by the instructors, they have the perception that there are opportunities for advancement. To many students, advancement means achieving a supervisory position, or at the very least, being given more responsibility and authority. These opportunities are important to the students because they still see the secretarial position as not "good enough." Even though the students now say that a secretarial position is an important job, they still do not see it as an end in itself. Rather, they hope to use it as a stepping stone to a higher position. The students are still being influenced by societal views and feel the need to move on to a position that commands more respect and pay.

"It's Not Just Following Orders." Instructors feel the hardest struggle they have is to convince students that they will in fact have to make decisions on the job. Students enter the program with the mindset that a secretary just follows the boss' orders. Instructors complain that even though many students blossom during the program, there are still some students who, at the end of the year, want to be told how to do everything. Instructors admit that it is hard to push students to work independently when there is so much resistance. Instructors also admit that they often lose out in the struggle to push students to think for themselves. Many times the resistance they receive from the students causes them to comply with the students' wishes. Instructors say sometimes they end up spoon-feeding the information rather than having the students solve the problem.

At the beginning of the program, students believe their bosses will be making all the decisions on the job, and so they fight the concept of decision-making; they just wanted to be told what to do. As they progress through the program, they slowly start to realize that decision-making will be part of their job. One student said:

> Suddenly, it hit me...the instructors were right. My boss probably would not care about the details and it would be up to me.

By the end of the program, most students come to accept that, in addition to taking orders, they probably will have to make some decisions. For example:

> A secretary may have complete control over the office or she may have to follow strict rules governing all aspects of the office.

What is Left Unspoken?

Through the 'curriculum-as-lived,' as instructors try to build students' confidence, they help the students reconstruct what it means to be a secretary. Through challenging student perceptions and through their stories about their own experience, instructors discuss respect, advancement and decision-making. What is omitted from of the discussions is the topic of pay. Students said that they did not learn about pay in the program.

When instructors were asked why the issue of pay was not discussed in class, some instructors said that they did not feel it was their place to talk about pay in their classes. Upon further questioning, one instructor admitted that she found the pay for secretaries frustrating. It bothered her that secretaries do not receive enough financial compensation for what they do. When asked how this affected her, she said it bothers her so she tries not to think about it.

The instructors in the program are trying to develop a new vision of a secretary for the students. They believe a secretarial job is a demanding position but they feel that, if the students believe in the stereotype, they can become the stereotype. In order to survive in the business world, students need to have confidence in themselves. An instructor said:

> I think by promoting confidence, we are providing them with a tool to survive in their jobs. Students are up against people who believe the stereotype. They have to deal with these people and if they

> don't have confidence, they will be crushed and
> become the stereotype.

The pay secretaries receive in the private sector does not support the new vision the instructors are trying to develop. Rather than discourage the students, the topic of pay is not discussed.

Conclusions

As instructors challenge students' original ideas about secretaries, students are forced to reflect on their own perceptions. Through the struggle between their original perceptions about secretaries and what their instructors are telling them, students are transformed. As students question their 'taken-for-granted' perceptions about secretaries and come to a new understanding, they construct a new sense of self.

From this research, it appears that students do not blindly accept what the teachers tell them. Students try to fit what they learn in class into their own experiences. Students struggle, try to make sense of their world, and then they re-define their world. Without the interaction between students and instructors through the functional curriculum, students would not question the world as it exists.

Students are "up against" the stereotype of a secretary. Through stories and discussions, instructors attempt to counter this image. Because the pay for secretaries does not fit with the new image, it is omitted from of the discussion and becomes a conflict that students will have to resolve on their own.

The curriculum-as-planned does not reveal how the spoken words of instructors add to the curriculum. These spoken words help to shape the identities of future office workers. As long as the gap between the written curriculum and the spoken curriculum is relatively small, instructors will probably continue to try to “correct” the curriculum-as-planned. But what if the curriculum does not change and the gap widens? Will the instructors be willing to speak out?

Recognized But ‘Not’ Recognized

Even though instructors recognize the importance of developing people skills (personal and interpersonal skills) in students, the written curriculum does ‘not’ recognize people skills. Tradition has affected the written curriculum so that it reflects principles taken from Taylorism. Recognizing that students need more than technical skills to survive in the workplace, instructors try to add in the human element. However, in doing so instructors face an invisible enemy. Many current ideas are so deeply rooted in Taylorism that people are not even aware of why they think the way they think. For example, an impression exists that people skills are ‘soft’ skills and that it would be wasteful to spend class time on topics such as positive attitude and appropriate dress for the office.

Because instructors do not receive support from the curriculum-as-planned, their goals are not always achieved.

The Need for People Skills

Even though students will likely perform the function of receptionists, they are not taught interpersonal skills in the program. Instructors attempt to add in 'people' skills but without the support of written objectives. Through the explicit and covert curriculum, the instructors try to build the following people skills: having a positive attitude, being able to adapt to change, dressing appropriately for the office, and working with others.

Having a Positive Attitude. Instructors think it is important for students to have a positive attitude. From past experiences, they have found that employers telephone not to complain that students lack technical skills, but that students have poor work attitudes or that they have trouble working with other employees. From discussions with employers, instructors realize that a positive attitude does not mean blind obedience to orders but, instead, a constructive approach to working.

Instructors tell students that employers want employees with a positive attitude. They stress that getting ahead in a secretarial position, or any other job, means being able to get along with others. Nevertheless, even though instructors promote the importance of having a positive attitude, they do not evaluate students on attitude. The first time students encounter evaluations that rate them on qualities such as attitude, initiative, confidence, and willingness to accept criticism is when they are on work experience or when they are hired. Since interpersonal skills and conflict resolution are not included in the curriculum, students do not learn techniques for solving problems using appropriate 'people' skills. For example, a past graduate from the program who had acquired a position as a receptionist at Canada Employment Center said that it used to bother her when clients blamed her if their cheques were late. She said it was "getting to the point" where she wondered if she should switch jobs because the stress was affecting her self-esteem. However, at the same time, she was taking a night class at the college on personnel management. She said that, through this class, she learned how to deal with people who were upset without taking it personally. She said that learning how to diffuse the situation by using empathy rather than by being defensive made all the difference to her job satisfaction.

Being Able to Adapt to Change. Instructors teaching the computer class know that in the computer world change is inevitable. They realize that students must learn to use new software when they are in the workplace. Instructors, therefore, considered it important not to teach students particular functions on a particular package, but skills that allow students to adapt as software changes. Even though instructors attempt to promote adaptability skills, they run into resistance from the students. For example, in the Microcomputer class, the instructor wants the students to use reference books and help keys to find solutions to problems. She feels if they learn these skills they will be able to adapt to new software in the future. The students reacted by complaining that the instructor was lazy when she did not show them how to use the software. A student said:

> I did not pay tuition to work on my own. It is her responsibility to teach us. If I understood the textbook, I would not be asking for help.

In reaction to the students' complaints, the instructor felt pressured to help the students more. Even though adaptability is valued by instructors, it is not considered when assigning marks. Students know if they push they can get help. If the curriculum rewards them for adapting and resolving problems on their own, students will have more incentive to solve problems before asking for help.

Dressing Appropriately for the Office. The Office Technology Program has "Dress-Up Wednesdays" when students are asked to dress appropriately for the office. "Dress-Up Wednesdays" was established to indicate by example just what is appropriate dress for office work. Instructors realize that not everyone knows how to dress properly for an office. For example, some students will wear "party dresses" on Wednesdays, believing them to be business attire. Making such a mistake on a job interview might prevent a student from being hired at all.

Even though instructors attempt in this ad hoc manner to build dress into the program by having "Dress-Up Wednesday" nothing happened to students who chose not to participate on Wednesdays. In fact, students who "dressed up" on Wednesdays were sometimes teased by other students for participating. Since "appropriate dress" is not part of the curriculum, and no class time is spent on the discussion of dress, many students did not learn from their Wednesday experience.

Working with Others. Although instructors recognize the importance of secretaries being able to work with others in an office, interpersonal skills are not formally addressed in any specific Office Technology course. In most Office Technology classes, instructors hope students will acquire people skills through group work. Even though instructors say working together is important, they expect students to work outside of class to accomplish the tasks. Students, therefore, receive mixed messages from the instructor regarding the value of working in groups. On the one hand, the students are told group work is important and, on the other hand, the instructor did not think group work was important enough to be dealt with in class. Students often comment that they find group work onerous since they have to find out-of-class time to get together.

> I realize that the instructors believe working together is important. But we are being group worked to death. I have group projects for three different classes with three different groups of students who need to get together at three different times.

With their already busy schedules, this is sometimes difficult to manage. To solve this problem, the students usually divide the work to be done into sections and then work individually. Someone in the group then types the entire report. As a result, ideas are not shared or exchanged to the degree that the instructor anticipated.

Conclusions

Some of the instructors joke about how students always ask, "Will that be on the test?" implying that if it is not worth marks, it is not important. However, lessons can be learned from such student comments.

In order for people skills to be valued in the program, instructors must first break away from the tradition which says that people skills are soft skills that do not need to be taught. After recognizing the value of these skills, instructors need to "go one step" further by giving class time and marks for them if they want students to value people skills in turn.

This lack of recognition for interpersonal skills is not specific to the Office Technology curriculum. Education as a whole appears to place little value on the importance of teaching students interpersonal skills. The curriculum assumes that students have these skills, but many do not.

Valued But 'Not' Valued

Students value each other but the curriculum does not value what students bring to the class. The curriculum must recognize that people are social beings who need to interact with one another. The value of this interaction cannot be ignored if education is to assist students in becoming better employees. As a rule, the curriculum does not acknowledge what students can gain by sharing their experiences and learning from each other.

Students Working With Students

Through working together, students can broaden and develop self-confidence by learning from each other. Research shows that collaborative work encourages students to probe more deeply and critically into course material (Cohen, 1989).

Sense of Belonging. By setting up the program in such a fashion that students spent most of their school day together, a situation is created where students in the program experience what they call a "sense of belonging." Some older students who thought they would be misfits at college since they viewed college as being only for young girls were surprised and thrilled about how they come to feel that they belong.

> Every single person who is in the program with me is fabulous. Most are young, single women with only a few old ladies like myself. Even so, they are a very friendly bunch and make me feel like I belong. I shall never forget these people for all the help and encouragement I have received.

Students spend the majority of their day together. They take classes together, go to coffee together and become close friends. These friendships ease the pressure and stress created as they try to excel in their courses. For example, one older student who was maintaining a D average (a single mother with five boys), admitted that over the Christmas break she had missed school and looked forwarding to returning.

One of the instructors said that she admired how the students accepted each other, simply for who they were. She said the students do not let different backgrounds or marital status interfere. They become friends, not necessarily because they have a common background or common interests but just because they are in the program together. For example, a forty-year-old woman with three children might become friends with an eighteen year old, directly out of high school. As they work together, they learn from each other. I overheard one conversation where an older women was saying to a younger woman, "Your boyfriend did that! Oh, I wouldn't put up with that. There are nice guys out there. You shouldn't tolerate that. I had to wait to find the right man but it was worth it."

The interaction between age groups adds to the class. The older students bring maturity and experience; the younger ones, a carefree atmosphere. Through interacting with each other and building friendships, students gain courage and confidence.

Students work hard to do well because they want their classmates to be proud of them. Class members are therefore very supportive of one another. For example, one student near the end of the semester had not achieved any of the five-minute timed writings that she needed to graduate. When she finally got a timed writing, the entire class stood and cheered for her.

It is difficult to capture in words what the students come to mean to each other. For some students these friendships are their lifeline. For instance, one student who had been in an abusive relationship for years finally had the courage to leave and was staying in the women's shelter.

Working Smarter Not Harder. In Business Communications, one of the Business Administration classes taken by Office Technology students, a one-month simulation operates in which students work together in teams. In the simulation, the instructors work to build an atmosphere where students can work with each other and learn from one another. The simulation is conducted in a different fashion from most group work in Office Technology because the instructor uses class time and forces the students to resolve problems without instructor intervention. The instructor spends a long time organizing the simulation and then handles all the incoming and outgoing projects; however, once the simulation begins, students are required to make the decision themselves or ask their "supervisor." To even talk to the instructor, students must first make an appointment. Many times, the instructor will refer the students back to the appropriate chain of command.

At first, the simulation is confusing for the students. They are accustomed to knowing expectations of them, so they find the first week of the simulation unsettling. There are marks not just for assignments but for organizing the people they supervise and for assuring only quality work leaves the office. At first, many team leaders are distraught because they do not have projects in their project folder. The instructor had to explain that if quality work comes from the team that reflects on the team leader. Once the students become accustomed to the new system, they adapt and enjoy the simulation. Many students comment on how the simulation is a very successful and interesting way to learn.

As the students worked together they begin to recognize why collaborative writing is being used more and more in business. The final product of the team was of a higher quality than any of the individuals in the group could produce. For example, students collaborated in writing a sales letter for another instructor in the Business Department. The instructor was totally amazed at the high quality of product. She had to admit that she could not have produced such an effective letter. An Office Technology instructor, after teaching the simulations, said:

> One thing I learned is once students have learned the theory and you (the instructor) want them to do an outstanding job on the application, you put them in groups. It is hard for an individual to get 10/10 on a writing assignment but as a team they can do it.

Conclusions

As students work and share together, their confidence improves. By learning to collaborate, students learn not only skills that made them better individuals but skills that make them better employees. In addition, by combining the knowledge of individuals, students can create products of a higher quality than any one of the individuals can produce alone.

Conclusions

Administrators considering the advantages of using a curriculum that is based on self-paced, individualized modules for the Office Technology Program, need also to consider the disadvantages. Even though the written documentation in the curriculum-as-planned for the Office Technology Program mainly reflects technical skills, this research shows the written documentation does not capture the complexity of what the students learn through the functional curriculum. The curriculum-as-planned reflects a curriculum that is becoming outdated. It is through a parallel curriculum that the instructors work to enhance the Office Technology curriculum so that the students will have the skills required for today's workforce. Through this parallel curriculum, words of instructors are spoken that otherwise would not be spoken, people skills are recognized that otherwise would not be recognized, and students are valued who otherwise would not be valued. In order for instructors to be more successful in enhancing the curriculum, the curriculum-as-planned will need to support their goals so the students do not receive mixed messages.

As the business world shifts to new management philosophies so must education. This may involve instructors using new methods of delivering material. For example, instructors may need to become facilitators rather than lecturers. There needs to be more research conducted in the classroom that will provide instructors with ways to be successful at preparing students with the qualities the business world is demanding.

A new curriculum is needed that takes into account the notion that, in order to prepare students to function in a workplace that has been democratized, the classroom must also reflect the values of democracy. This curriculum would support the philosophy of John Dewey.

> The kind of vocational education in which I am interested is not one which will 'adapt' workers to the existing industrial regime....but one which will alter the existing industrial system and ultimately transform it. (Dewey as quoted by Simon, 1992, p. 5)

This transformed curriculum will involve a new mindset for instructors and students. Institutional administrators must support the new curriculum in order for it to be successful.

CHAPTER SIX

RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

According to employers interviewed for this research, the role of the secretary is becoming more administrative. Employers want secretaries with more managerial and organizational skills, secretaries who can take initiative and make decisions. Employers are clear that the old secretarial job description where the secretary types and files is no longer viable or relevant. Educators must educate secretaries for the world of the 90s, not train secretaries for a fictional stereotype that does not exist.

Some students were influenced to take the Office Technology Program at this particular college because of its reputation as a good solid program, with good instructors and successful placement of students into jobs. The high rate of graduate placement in secretarial positions at a time of high unemployment is an indicator of the success of the program. After analyzing this Office Technology Program, the following recommendations for improving it are included.

Humanize the Curriculum

Acknowledge the Importance of Humanizing the Curriculum

The need to humanize the Office Technology Curriculum should be addressed. As the business world changes and recognizes the need for interpersonal relations, so must the curriculum for the Office Technology Program. Research from sources like the Conference Board of Canada show that the employability skills Canadian employers want include personal management skills (self-esteem, confidence, honesty, integrity, personal ethics, positive attitude, initiative, responsibility, accountability and adaptability) and teamwork skills. Through classroom activities and experiences, instructors must help facilitate students to develop these skills. An environment needs to be created where students have the opportunity to construct their own knowledge instead of accepting traditional stereotypes without question.

Classroom activities should give more than just 'lip service' to people skills. For example, more group work could be organized in a manner that privileges collaboration in class. That is, activities could be assigned that can be completed by the groups in class, rather than at home by individual members of the group. In addition to incorporating interpersonal skills into the curriculum, instructors will need to address people skills in class as they arise.

This may mean providing training for some instructors so they are prepared for such situations.

In conjunction with their courses, students could work in teams in a model office doing real assignments that have been approved by the instructor. In the model office, students would be evaluated for their people skills. The model office would be a marked and graded portion of the curriculum.

Acknowledge the Role of Instructors

The role instructors play in shaping future office workers needs to be acknowledged by administration. The transformation in student perceptions occurs primarily because their views are challenged by instructors. Without this transformation, students would be ill-prepared for the workforce.

Acknowledge the Importance of Students Working Together

The importance of the experience and knowledge that students bring to class must be recognized, as well as the importance of interactions among students for building confidence and self-esteem. Instructors need to build an atmosphere where students can bond and work together.

Enhance the Office Technology Program

The deskilling fostered by Taylorism is no longer a value; enhancing now represents new management philosophies. The Office Technology curriculum must necessarily reflect this shift in values. Because employers interviewed for this study want an office worker who is similar to an office manager, the Office Technology Program must prepare its students to fill that function. The program should consider offering a diploma program where students are prepared to become office managers. In the past, only a few students who have completed the Office Technology Program have returned to take the second year towards a Business Administration diploma in Office and Business Administration. By creating a fast-track 18-month Office Management Co-op Diploma program, there would be more incentive for students to return to take the second year. In this program, students would take Office Technology fall and winter semesters, a co-op semester over the summer (May - August), and then a fall semester of courses which would include management courses and approved options. Students could graduate by Christmas of the second year. If the co-op option is not available, the program should look at updating the second year so it is more practical in nature. Students could receive credit for practicums where they work for a certain number of hours in a business setting as they attend their classes.

Break the Stereotype

Students

Time Required for the Journey. Many students entering the Office Technology Program believe in the traditional stereotype of a secretary - a stereotype where a secretarial position is viewed as an undemanding job that anyone can do. In contrast, the instructors believe that a secretary holds a demanding and important job. As the instructors' vision of a secretary clashes with the students' vision, there is tension. As students struggle to construct a new identity and form a new belief system about what it means to be a secretary, there is ongoing conflict. By the end of the program, most students appear to internalize a new image where secretaries deserve respect. Even though students challenge their original perceptions, their journey is not finished. Because the stereotype is so deeply rooted in students' thinking, it takes time to reform these beliefs. The length of the program needs to be extended since more time is needed to accommodate proper professional preparation. At present, students completing the Office Technology Program are just beginning to realize their potential. By increasing the length of the program, students would have the opportunity to achieve their potential.

In times of financial cutbacks there exists a danger that administrators will "fall into the trap" of believing in the stereotype of the secretary and then decide to provide short-term, non-credit programs. Such misguided action could result in unemployable graduates and the complete deterioration of the program. Female-dominated training is always at risk in times of fiscal restraint since the training is often not valued and the programs are often the target of cutbacks. Short-term training would only exaggerate the cycle of disadvantage for women rather than break it. This study shows that employers want secretaries who are educated as well as trained. Successful secretaries of the 90s must have the broadly-based knowledge that cannot be supplied by courses which focus on narrow, specific skills. To help achieve this goal, the program must be a minimum of 45 credit hours and be three semesters in length. The university model of 30 credit hours is not appropriate for an office technology program. Students in a skill-based program are different from students in a university transfer program. Class time is needed where instructors can work to help students develop the skills, confidence, and decision-making abilities required for today's office job. The fall and winter semesters in the Office Technology Program should be devoted to class work and the spring semester to work experience. The work experience can operate in conjunction with actual employment. For example, if a student is hired as a secretary, she or he can apply that experience to the work experience.

Even though colleges can get caught in the tradition of teaching Office Technology the way it has always been done and graduating secretaries for yesterday's world, colleges can enhance their curriculum so they can turn out professionals for today and tomorrow's world.

Give Support for the New Vision. The instructors take the students on a journey to help them develop a new perception of the secretary. It is crucial for instructors to have support on this journey. For example, many students begin to question the taken-for-granted perceptions they once had about secretaries. As they try to make sense of their world, they would benefit from knowing the background of the secretarial position. Videotapes on the history of the position could address such issues as respect, pay, and advancement. Even though the displays in the typewriting labs are for motivational purposes, it is recommended that the displays be a blend of ideas. For example, some displays might target keyboarding, but other displays would represent work from other areas in the secretarial field. One display should focus on Professional Secretaries International and the Certified Professional Secretary Examinations. Employers from the local community could be invited into class as guest speakers to talk about the secretarial position. Students could go to the business world and do job shadowing and work experience when they are still attending college. This first-hand experience observing working secretaries would give the students a new frame of reference that could support the instructors' dialogue.

Integrate Students. To help build students' confidence, it would be advantageous to integrate the Office Technology students with the Business Administration students in classes that are common to both programs. This would enable the Office Technology students to see that Business Administration students take some of the classes they take. It would also help both groups to challenge the stereotype.

Instructors

Integrate Instructors. The Office Technology instructors feel the impact of the stereotype. They feel that there is a caste system in their department which places them at the bottom. By integrating the Office Technology instructors into the same space as the Business Administration instructors, and by having Business Administration instructors teach some of the Office Technology students, this caste system might be challenged.

Link the Office Technology Program to the Business World

Instead of becoming trapped in the rut of following tradition, college curriculum needs to be proactive and lead change, not lag behind the business world. In the business world, management philosophies are changing. Unfortunately, many times instructors are so busy keeping up with technology and preparing for day-to-day activities, they cannot find the time to meet and work with the business community. Workload relief time should be built into the program so that instructors can have regular contact with the business community. In addition, support in the form of time or money should be available so that instructors can work in spring session in the business community. In this way, they can experience first hand the current situation in the business world.

This contact would have two-way implications. The instructors would learn about the business community and the business community would have a chance to learn more about the Office Technology Program from instructors. Education, in general, has become separated from the 'real' world. There need to be more linkages between educational institutions and the community so that students are better prepared for the working world.

Make Applications as Realistic as Possible

Students enjoyed the realism in the simulation in their Business Communications class. They felt they gained important 'people skills' through interaction with others in their groups. More classes should use this group approach to provide projects that simulate real world experience.

Get Feedback From Students During the Semester

Traditionally, students evaluate the instructor on paper and the instructor receives the results after the semester finishes. It is suggested that, in addition to this traditional method, that four student representatives meet with the instructor on a regular basis so the instructor can receive feedback more frequently. This way communication between students and their instructors is strengthened.

Break the Traditional Mould

Business trends indicate that more and more Canadians work part-time and that more Canadians are working out of their homes. Office Technology students should be encouraged to look at non-traditional roles. For example, they may not have a nine-to-five job but two part-time jobs, or they may wish to start their own business.

Make Students Aware of the Second Year

Instructors need to make students aware that they can take a second year of courses in Business Administration in order to graduate with a Business Administration diploma.

Conclusions

Instructors in the Office Technology Program recognize the need to enhance and humanize the Office Technology curriculum. However, in order for them to be successful in this endeavor, they will need support from administration.

CHAPTER SEVEN

REFLECTIONS

Reflections--Program Changes

After the research was conducted, the following changes were made in the Office Technology Program.

Changed the Program Description

The program description was rewritten to better reflect the curriculum-as-lived. It now states:

> With globalization of the economy, the role of an office worker is dramatically changing. The Office Technology Program prepares graduates for entry-level positions for the office of the 90s. Students will also acquire thinking and problem solving skills, strong communication skills and the learning skills which will assist them in finding, keeping and progressing in a job.

Integrated Office Technology Students with Business Administration Students

Where possible, in classes required for both Office Technology students and Business Administration students, sections have been mixed. As a result, more unity and a greater understanding between the two groups was evident.

Business Administration students have been stronger in decision-making skills and this seems to have influenced some of the Office Technology students. In addition, the Office Technology students have good organizational skills and good formatting skills; this knowledge has been helpful to the Business Administration students. A direct result of the integration is that more Office Technology students are considering pursuing their second year so they can get a Business Administration diploma.

In addition, the Business Administration instructors who taught classes consisting of both Office Technology and Business Administration students have requested we continue to combine the two programs. They were impressed by what they saw as the changes in the Office Technology Program. However, the Office Technology instructors have a different assessment. They feel that, even though curriculum has changed, the perceptions of the Business Administration instructors is a direct result of their improved understanding of the Office Technology area.

Integrated Office Technology Instructors with Business Administration Instructors

Office Technology instructors were integrated into the same office area as the Business Administration instructors. In order to assure no resentment, care was taken that Business Administration instructors were not displaced. In order to fit all instructors' offices into the area, an audiovisual equipment room was converted into an office. Having all the instructors in one area has resulted in better communication. Instructors in Office Technology have also commented that they do not feel the caste system as much since being integrated.

Incorporated Human Relations into the Curriculum

Human relations were incorporated into the Office Technology curriculum to help students develop skills in interpersonal communication through practice and application. In addition to interpersonal communications, students learn about communicating feelings and emotions, responding to the emotions of others, managing work relationships, leading and participating in small group discussions, handling interpersonal conflicts, managing group conflict and coping with difficult people.

Incorporated Group Work into Courses

Instructors from the Office Technology Program now incorporate group work into their curriculum. Rather than telling the students to read the textbook and then spending the class period reviewing what the students have already read, instructors place students into groups. The instructors then administer individual and group mini-tests on the reading assignment. The remaining class time is spent on application exercises where students have the opportunity to apply what they have learned.

Mini-tests. The instructors find the mini-tests to be very effective. Rather than being a "Sage on the Stage," the instructor becomes a "Guide on the Side." (Michaelson, 1992) The instructor prepares effective mini-tests and then creates applications that will challenge the students. It is more difficult than the lecture method to implement, but the Office Technology instructors using this approach found it more effective. Following the Michaelson Model (Michaelson, 1992), instructors would place the teams into groups based on the concept they wished to teach. For example, for a microcomputer class, the instructors would arrange the students according to their level of expertise in using computers. The instructor would then construct groups composed of members with varying computer experience. The groups were formed in class so the students would not feel there was any favoritism.

Michaelson's (1992) research shows that the longer a group was together, the more effective the group became. With this in mind, the same groups were maintained all semester. The class was instructed to read the assignment; then they were given an individual mini-test and a group mini-test. The tests were marked in class for immediate feedback. If the students did not agree with an answer on the quiz or if they felt that a question had been ambiguous, they could complete an appeal form and submit it to the instructor. The instructor would appraise the appeal outside of class time. If the appeal was approved, all group members would receive the revised mark. The instructors enjoyed the appeal process for a few reasons. If they had made a mistake, they were not placed in a compromising position in front of the students but had time to reevaluate the question. An additional advantage was pedagogical. The process prompted students to check over their quizzes, go back into their text, and restudy the material to see if they could gain points. When student appeals were approved, the students were thrilled. One student said, "Hey, we do have some power."

After the mini-test was completed, the students were given a situation where they had to apply what they had learned from the textbook. Resolution of this application usually involved critical thinking skills and team work.

Created a Model Office

In conjunction with the Travel & Tourism Program, the Office Technology program created a model office where students could perform realistic applications in teams. In the model office, students are evaluated using the same criteria as would be used in business.

Incorporated 'Real' Applications into "Computerized Office Applications"

In the Computerized Office Applications course, work was framed as group projects involving real applications. Permission was received from the Dean of Business for a group project to replace the final examination.

Changed Displays

In the past, displays only advertised typewriting; they have been changed to incorporate students' projects. When people had the opportunity to see the high quality of work that the Office Technology students could produce, they made comments on how drastically the Office Technology field has changed. As a result of one display, the coordinator of the Office Technology Program was asked to show students' projects to the Board of Governors.

Added Job Shadowing

Job shadowing was added in the fall and winter semesters. Students are provided with an opportunity to observe an office for one day each semester so that they will have a better understanding of what an office is really like. Then students must answer questions from the instructor and report on their shadowing experience in an essay.

Prepared a Proposal for an Office Management Diploma

A proposal was prepared for an Office Management Diploma program. To earn this diploma, students complete the one-year Office Technology Certificate and then participate in a second year during which they receive practical experience while taking Business Administration courses.

Built A New Computer Lab

One of the critical changes for the Office Technology Program was a new computer lab. The students interviewed complained about having difficulties registering in the two existing labs because they were often booked. The two labs could not accommodate the extra computer classes that computerizing the Office Technology Program created. As a result of a proposal requesting a new computer lab from the Office Technology Coordinator, a third lab was added to the computer center. The Office Technology Program was given priority booking.

Computerized Office Technology Courses

With a computer lab instead of typing room, the following courses were revised to implement computer applications:

Introductory Keyboarding/Word Processing and Intermediate Keyboarding/Word Processing. These classes were updated from using

typewriters and typing documents to using a computerized Cortez Peters package and word processing software.

Introductory Office Procedures. This class was updated to include a computerized database and e-mail.

Solving Business Problems Using Computers. The Solving Business Problems Using Computers class was originally the Business Mathematics and Machines class that the students had complained was too elementary. It has been updated to include a month of Simply Accounting, a review of mathematics basics and the use of spreadsheets to solve business problems.

Computerized Office Applications. This class has been updated to include window versions of word processing, spreadsheets, database and a business presentation package. Students work in teams to create real projects.

Integrated Software into Classes

The microcomputer class was dropped from the Office Technology curriculum. The software packages were integrated into existing classes. For example, data-base management is covered in Office Procedures in the mail unit.

Changed the Emphasis of the Accounting Class

The Basic Accounting course that the Office Technology students take had been modeled on the Introductory Accounting course. The goal of Introductory

Accounting is to prepare students who plan to work toward an accounting designation. Rather than having a "watered down" version of Introductory Accounting, Basic Accounting class was changed to a bookkeeping course. The goal of this course is to prepare students to keep books manually and electronically.

Recruited a Different Audience

An advertisement that targeted unemployed university graduates was placed in the newspaper for the Office Technology Program. There was a good response from people interested in the program.

Worked with the High Schools

Since many students come straight from high school to the Office Technology Program, it is important that the college not lose contact with high school programs. The Office Technology Program worked with teachers at the high school to see if the two programs could dovetail. It was decided that if students have completed modules at the high school level that are comparable to material at the college level, they should be given advanced standing.

Personal Reflections

How people see the world is affected by their experiences. Being no exception, my experiences have helped shape my beliefs. As I wrote this document, I reflected on my experience in the areas of (1) the importance of learning from history, (2) the influence of instructors, and (3) the dangers of stereotyping.

Learning from the Past

History appears to repeat itself in education. For example, competency-based education is not a new concept. However, people who have never experienced it often treat the notion as a cure-all. They are enthusiastic about how it allows students to work at their own rate. In a sense it can become a kind of credo: if anyone dares to challenge the idea of competency-based education, they are accused of not being open to change. Having taught in an area where change is constantly affecting curriculum, I have come to enjoy the changes that technology brings. However, I also think people need to learn from the past. Competency-based education has certain advantages but we also need to examine its disadvantages. Even though there is a recent initiative to move in this direction for accountability, why did we move away from competency-based education in the past? Have these issues been resolved? Are we willing to make the same mistakes again just because we have not studied the record? Research tells us that competency-based education narrows learning; I also have my own personal experiences with competency-based education.

Many years ago when I was student teaching, I worked at a school which used competency-based education for all the subjects in high school. My student-teaching was in the Business Education classes. Although the high achievers were able to work through the curriculum faster, I felt they "missed out" on the extras that a teacher and other students add to a class. Competency-based education is supposed to support individual needs so students who are having trouble can take more time to learn concepts. I found, however, that students who were having difficulties and students who were not self-motivated floundered. Without the teacher to push them, they fell even further behind. In addition, it seemed that most Fridays and Mondays were unproductive days. The attitude was to slow down on Friday since it was almost the weekend, and then to spend most of Monday trying to get motivated again.

Influence of Instructors

Instructors teaching Office Technology must believe that secretaries perform an important function. Through their training, students acquire ideas that will help shape their beliefs. If the students are taught that secretarial work is an easy position and that their job is minor, they could acquire these beliefs and support the stereotype. I recently had a conversation with a woman who had once taught secretarial courses at a vocational center. She was telling a story and then added, "Well, of course, they were just secretarial students so what could you expect?" She gave me one of those "knowing looks" as if I should understand. I thought, "How would that attitude have affected her students?" It can be a self-fulfilling prophecy. If a student is told she/he is going to be "a nobody," that is who she/he could become.

I thought back to my past and remembered how I was treated when I was going through school. I first went to university for a year but, since I was majoring in Business Education, I had to take some courses at a college which offered secretarial courses. I decided I would take a secretarial certificate and then transfer some of the courses to the university before completing my Bachelor of Education degree. I found, however, that while I was taking the secretarial program, people treated me differently than when I was in university. When I was in the secretarial program, some people would assume I was not intelligent.

My own self-esteem was not damaged by this experience. I had always done well in school and knew that people's perception of me was incorrect. But what about students from a different background? What if they believed others' perceptions? How could this affect them?

Blonde Jokes

At the time of the interviewing for this project, there was a proliferation of "blonde jokes." I asked the students what they thought about "blonde jokes." Almost all students felt that blonde jokes were harmless. I asked different people which job they would give the blonde from a blonde joke. Most people said secretarial. This bothered me. Blonde jokes promote a stereotype. Whether they realize it or not, blonde jokes are not funny and harmless; they send a strong message. Are blonde jokes another way to suppress women by reinforcing the traditional stereotype of the "dumb blonde?" Do blonde jokes support the sociological double standard that men are superior to women? Today it is not politically correct to joke about different races but blonde jokes are seen as acceptable. I read an article in the newspaper, where a psychologist said that blonde jokes were harmless because they did not affect someone's ability to secure a job. I disagree. If someone is overlooked for a position because the employer associates them with the "dumb blonde stereotype," then it is harmful. We need to be aware of the dangers of stereotypes and the dangers of jokes that promote the stereotype.

Students' Experiences with the Stereotype

When I first started interviewing the students at the beginning of the semester, I found most of them to be defensive about issues such as women's work versus men's work. Most students made it clear that this was the 90s; everything was fair and there was "no" discrimination. They also made it clear that being in the program was "their choice." As they progressed through the program, many of their perceptions about a secretarial job were called into question. Students began to feel that the role of a secretary was undervalued. They started to look at the issue of women's work in a new light. Students would comment about how they had misconceptions about secretaries since they had been influenced by the traditional stereotype. They were disturbed by how secretaries are portrayed on television and in the movies.

Students were concerned that many people believe in the stereotype of the secretary. When I interviewed the students, I asked them how this could be changed. Many students were frustrated and hoped change would occur but said they were not sure of how or when this would happen. However, after thinking and reflecting about this issue, most students thought change could occur if people only knew the truth. One student said to me, "Someone has to tell them the real story." She then added, "You are writing a book for your research, aren't you?" I said, "Yes." She looked at me, smiled and with confidence said, "Well, then——*you* can tell them."

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